

**UCC Library and UCC researchers have made this item openly available.
Please [let us know](#) how this has helped you. Thanks!**

Title	Building an integrated history of musical numbers in Brazilian chanchadas
Author(s)	Cesarino Costa, Flávia
Editor(s)	Courage, Tamara Elduque, Albert
Publication date	2020
Original citation	Cesarino Costa, F. (2020) 'Building an integrated history of musical numbers in Brazilian chanchadas', Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media, 19, pp. 13-27. doi: 10.33178/alpha.19.02
Type of publication	Article (peer-reviewed)
Link to publisher's version	http://www.alphavillejournal.com/Issue19/ArticleCosta.pdf http://dx.doi.org/10.33178/alpha.19.02 Access to the full text of the published version may require a subscription.
Rights	© 2020, the Author(s). This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License . https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/
Item downloaded from	http://hdl.handle.net/10468/10301

Downloaded on 2021-11-27T12:05:05Z

Building an Integrated History of Musical Numbers in Brazilian *Chanchadas*

Flávia Cesarino Costa

Abstract: *This article discusses industrial and aesthetical aspects of the musical numbers in 1950s Brazilian chanchadas. The chanchadas were a body of films made between the 1930s and 60s, that combined a mixed style derived from domestic influences of radio and popular music routines and from local forms of comic theatrical revues. I propose an examination of the entertainment industry's influence on the musical numbers chosen for these 1950s chanchadas. This intermedial approach is based on the strong links between cinema and other cultural practices. I will argue the need to take into account not only theatrical practices, but also the routines of Carnival culture, as well as the music industry and radio performances, in order to reconsider longstanding historical accounts based on the specificity of film media.*

The vast majority of 1940s and 50s Brazilian musical comedies belong to the *chanchada* genre: a type of cinema strongly associated with the Carnival form and function. This analysis intends to understand the musical number in these *chanchadas* as it intersects with many media practices, considering both the industrial and the aesthetic dimension of this connection. I will prove the usefulness of an intermedial approach by focusing on events occurring within the music industry and popular theatre landscape at the time of the film's production so that musical numbers can be better contextualised and explained.

The *chanchadas* were musical comedies that featured many musical numbers inserted within comedic plots, were based on successful formulae and were produced within tight deadlines, a few months prior to Carnival. Since their inception in the 1930s, the *chanchadas* held a strong connection with its audience. As Stephanie Dennison and Lisa Shaw note, “these films incorporated actors and popular performers, many from humble origins themselves, who had established careers in music hall, the radio and the circus” (64). *Chanchadas* were pivotal in showcasing popular hits that had already or were in the process of being recorded in album form, produced in contemporary theatrical revues and broadcasted on the radio. Therefore, timing was key to their production and success in the film industry as they were designed to be released in association with the annual Carnival festivities, resulting in a constrained creative atmosphere for its authors. As Sérgio Augusto explains:

If the Carnival date would be at the end of February, for instance, the film script should be ready by November, and be shot in December. Before that, around October, producers estimated what would be the probable musical Carnival hits, based on the most successful composers and singers in previous years. (14)¹

In that sense, this genre's mode of production was firmly entrenched in the wider commercial logic of radio and popular music, as well as the theatrical revues and illustrated press, especially in the country's major southern state capitals, Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, and little towns in the countryside. For this reason, these films were heavily influenced by the

popular culture context in which they were produced and exhibited, and reflected the musical diversity in the country: “Carnival sambas and *marchas* were performed in the *chanchada* alongside an increasingly eclectic mix of imported and regional rhythms such as the Mexican bolero and the North Eastern *baião*, reflecting changing audience tastes moulded by the radio” (Dennison and Shaw 65). It was also common for directors’ names to be omitted from the *chanchadas*’ publicity displays while singers and musicians were often included alongside famous actors such as Mesquitinha, Grande Otelo, Oscarito, Eliana, Adelaide Chiozzo, Zé Trindade, José Lewgoy, and Ankito.

The most successful *chanchadas* of the 1930s were produced by Cinédia, Waldow Filmes, Brasil Vita Filme and Sonofilmes. However, profitable *chanchada* productions of the 1940s and 50s belonged to Atlântida Cinematográfica which was founded by José Carlos Burle, Alinor Azevedo, Moacyr Fenelon and others in 1941. In addition to Fenelon, José Carlos Burle, Watson Macedo and Carlos Manga directed films for the company, which by 1947, had most of its shares bought by the film exhibitor Luiz Severiano Ribeiro. Then, in the early 1950s, Fenelon and Macedo left Atlântida to create their own companies. Although always warmly received by the public, the *chanchadas* were widely perceived by the critics and press of that time as a vulgar type of cinema due to its quick production turnaround schedules and its lack of a serious or elaborate filmic form. At the end of the 1950s, the critic Alex Viany defined *chanchadas* as “popular comedy, generally speedy and sloppy, with musical interpolations” (qtd. in Augusto 17–8).

However, from the 1980s onwards film scholars both inside and outside Brazil began to show an interest in *chanchadas* and have defended their importance in Brazilian film history. Starting with the scholar João Luiz Vieira’s early works, many facets of these musical comedies from the 1930s to the 1950s have since been investigated, including their genre specificities and their parodical, sociopolitical dimension. The connection between *chanchadas* and other media such as Carnival and radio practices has often been highlighted in this scholarship, to the point of proposing that these relationships result in a specific Brazilian *chanchada* genre. However, the study of simultaneous influences of different media tends to favour general approaches and has never focused solely on the influence of musical numbers.

Through a context-driven analysis of the *chanchadas*’ musical numbers, this article will highlight the pertinent relationship between film and other media, in both industrial and aesthetic terms. I propose an approach that is not limited to film specificity and in this sense that accepts other media through a detailed historic explanation. In recognising these strong links between cinema and other cultural practices, I am indebted to Charles Musser’s notion of the necessity of an integrated history of stage and screen. I will argue for the need to analyse both the circulation of theatrical practices and the routines of Carnival culture, the music industry and radio performances in an attempt to reconsider longstanding historical assumptions on the specificity of the film medium.

I will focus on two musical numbers from Moacyr Fenelon’s 1951 film *Tudo azul* (*It’s All Right*), which was directed under the Flama production company, after Fenelon left Atlântida. I align my argument with Alcir Lenharo, who stresses the pre-eminence of radio over cinema in Brazilian mass culture of the 1940s and 50s (135); and with Luís Alberto Rocha Melo, whose stardom analysis of *Tudo azul* is based on the conviction of an intense relationship between film and the broader cultural context:

The mutual interactions between radio, the record industry and the cinema illustrate that in Brazilian popular musical comedies stardom cannot be understood at a strictly cinematic level. It is a wider phenomenon, the result of the interplay between the cinema and a nascent “culture industry”, which included not only the radio and the record industry, but also the press and, from the second half of the 1950s onward, television. (“Radio Stars” 153–4)

I will call attention to the aesthetic choices involving songs, musicians, singers, as well as staging practices inserted in the films, pointing to the industrial context surrounding these practices. I aim to separate the analysis of these musical numbers from the usual considerations on the relationship between them and their film plots.

Although the plot provides a good starting point to examining *Tudo azul*'s narrative structure, my area of focus will be the intermedial connections of two specific musical numbers in the film. The first number is a performance by radio singer Jorge Goulart and my central concern is his participation in this musical number and how his relationship to the phonographic industry influenced the choreography of the filmed performance. I will then comment on the intermedial connections between Jorge's character and the film's plot. The second musical number features the theatrical revue starlet Virgínia Lane. Here, I will discuss the relationship between the number and Lane's participation in Walter Pinto's revue *Eu quero sassaricá* (*I Want to Fool Around*), since Pinto was the most revered theatrical revue entrepreneur during that historical period of the *chanchadas*. I will also demonstrate the connections between these musical numbers, Carnival and the illustrated press. My analysis of these musical numbers will reveal the pervasive and dynamic interplay between media and how the intermedial relations rescue our understanding of *Tudo azul* from a limiting “cinema-centric position” criticised by Charles Musser (3).

In coordination with the annual Carnival festivities, *Tudo azul* was produced late in 1951 in Rio de Janeiro and released on 11 February 1952 by Fenelon's independent company Flama. The screenplay was created by Alinor Azevedo, the most prolific and well-regarded screenwriter in the industry during the 1940s and 50s, and who was also credited with writing the most creative and intelligent *chanchadas* of the period, yet who lived in conflict with what was then considered unsophisticated filmmaking. For *Tudo azul*, he tried to build a more realistic narrative that portrayed the lives of ordinary people, even if interspersed with musical numbers. As explained by Melo, “despite having made or participated in the production of many carnival films, Moacyr Fenelon and Alinor Azevedo were, each in their own way, quite resistant to the genre” (“Radio Stars” 153).

Film historian Alex Viány, in his book *Introdução ao cinema brasileiro* (*Introduction to Brazilian Cinema*, 1959) states that *Tudo azul* had been underestimated and it was a decent film surrounding the daily life of an ordinary man, “despite the intrusion of Carnival numbers” and the omission of many scenes from the original script (166). Historian Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes also considers *Tudo azul* a milestone in the revitalisation of the *chanchada* genre (78). Even with its ten musical numbers, the film is considered both by Viány and Salles Gomes an example of “renewal and innovation within the carnival musical genre at the time”, and better than most *chanchadas* due to its realist intentions (Melo, “Radio Stars” 144). The film has two well-defined parts. The first part inserts a realistic tone, demonstrating the protagonist's everyday life and struggles in writing songs for famous radio singers. In this first part, the musical numbers are integrated into the diegesis. The second part of the film consists of several musical numbers that occur in the protagonist's dreamworld. An understanding of the historical

context surrounding Brazilian musical comedies will help highlight the intermedial relations between musical numbers and other media.

Brazilian Musical Comedies and Their Musical Numbers

In recent decades, several scholars have rescued the *chanchada* genre from its former oversimplified, negative critical perception. Rafael de Luna Freire explains that the term *chanchada* appeared in the 1940s as an adjective to indicate a general dissatisfaction with the films, and its use as a noun was first consolidated in the 1970s, when it was more objectively defined as a synonym for a Brazilian comedy genre (*Carnaval* 103). Sérgio Augusto defends the quality of films that were produced by Atlântida from 1940 onwards, even acknowledging how musical numbers often showed traces of other artistic practices (111). Despite his significant contribution to genre criticism of popular Brazilian cinema, though, Augusto's work falls short of analysing the influence of the intermedial traces within the *chanchada* films.

Vieira's prolific work on the *chanchadas* began with *Hegemony and Resistance* (1984), during a time when it lacked academic interest. Since then, he has produced many pioneering studies on the subject. In his chapter on Brazil in Creekmur and Mokdad's *The International Film Musical* (2012), Vieira explains:

A derogatory epithet created by hostile mainstream film critics, *chanchada* refers to a body of films made between the mid-1930s and continuing in modified form up to the early to mid-1960s, featuring predominantly comic plots interspersed with musical numbers that, with few exceptions, disrupted the coherence and predictability of the narrative world. (141)

Vieira proceeds to highlight how Brazilian musical comedies relied on the popular theatrical revue actors, a "ready-made cast of actors and performers amongst Brazil's radio stars, whose established appeal and popularity made them a huge box-office draw" (146). These artists were frequently integrated within the backstage plots of 1930s Cinédia Studios *filmusicais* and the more complex narrative structures of the *chanchadas* in the 1940s and 50s, when Atlântida Studios in Rio (inaugurated in 1941) consolidated its role as the most important production company in the musical comedy market (147). Like Augusto, Vieira acknowledges the intermedial forms within the films and deepens the investigation of their commercial relationship with Carnival, in which the investment in cinema also brought dividends through music revenues, radio broadcasts and press circulation on the local star system. Vieira analyses the inversions, satires and parodies of *chanchada* plots, its social critiques and "tropes of subverting established hierarchies" (148), as well as the development of the triangle hero/girl/villain that "created the first exclusively cinematographic actors", since the others emerged from circus, popular theatre or the radio ("Chanchada" 372). He also comments on the wages of famous *chanchada* actors such as Oscarito, explaining that primary sources of income were more likely to derive from live performances in the theatre and circus than from work in the film industry (*Hegemony* 67). It is important, however, to include these activities in the study of *chanchadas*, not only as a means of subsistence for its stars but in their role within the production processes and the creative decisions made on behalf of the films.

More recently, scholars have refocused their critical analyses toward the influence of external media on the *chanchadas*. For example, Stephanie Dennison and Lisa Shaw call attention to the role film magazines play in maintaining the national star system through

published interviews and articles with *chanchada* stars, making it possible for these performers to tour the country and earn salaries from their participation in films (63). They build an extensive description of Brazilian cinema in the *chanchada* era and pave the way for future studies on the relationship between this Brazilian film genre and contemporary stage plays, singers, songs and illustrated magazines.

In her outstanding research on Brazilian cinema, Lisa Shaw has detailed some important features in *chanchadas*. She shows how “parodies of high culture were to become characteristic of the *chanchada* genre” (“*Chanchada*” 64), and examines the relationship between Brazilian and American cinema, considering that these light musical comedies “were used to promote carnival music and were often modelled on Hollywood movies of the same era” (“*Brazilian Chanchada*” 70). Although it is vital to understand how parody functions within the plots, it is also necessary to connect a film’s parodic structure to its external influences; Carnival songs and theatrical revue plots, by way of analysing specific examples. Shaw points to the Hollywood templates used by *chanchadas*, but it is also useful to illustrate how theatrical revues locally absorbed and reworked these templates before they were reabsorbed by the films via their actors’ performances, staging styles and plots. Sheila Schvarzman recognises the connection between record releases and films (with cast numbers predominantly comprised of well-known and established singers), but an investigation into how these connections between record companies, radio stations and cinema were organised or could be perceived by spectators remains underexplored (93).

Far from underestimating these important contributions to our knowledge of *chanchadas*, I aim to stress the need for a more detailed analysis of their musical numbers. It may reveal the complex functioning of media, helping to clarify the mode by which the signs were circulated between the simultaneous cultural practices of that time. Although the connection between media is often mentioned in these studies, this topic requires more concrete research. For instance, the staging and acting of the Brazilian *chanchada* resulted from a negotiation between the typical Hollywood plot formula and local Brazilian theatrical revue references along with a musical context that was linked to the radio industry. Musical numbers can be studied as being interwoven into the fabric of such diverse cultural and media features.

I herein propose a detour in the methodology of Brazilian cinema analysis for this period, focusing less on the internal coherence of plots and its frequent parodic references to Hollywood and more on the entertainment industry’s influence on the internal configuration of the musical numbers within *chanchadas*. I aim to draw from previous scholarship but will apply an intermedial approach to my analysis which displaces cinema from the central focus while exploring the complexities of other media.

Brazilian Cinema and Other Media

Musical numbers formed a significant part of Brazilian musical comedies, from the introduction of sound in 1931 to the arrival of television in the late 1950s. *Filmes cantantes* (films with music) was already common practice as songs were played alongside silent film exhibitions. In 1930, film sound emerged in major Brazilian cities, then took a decade to become standard industry practice once the Movietone optical system replaced other sound equipment in most film theatres (Freire, “*Conversão*” 48). The Brazilian phonographic industry was first introduced by the company Casa Edison in 1902 when it started to record Brazilian music discs in Rio de Janeiro. However, it was not until the early 1930s that commercial radio

broadcasting became a popular media form. During the early 1930s, *teatro de revista* (theatrical revues) was the most dominant route to publicising new song releases in Rio de Janeiro. They attracted both popular and more erudite musicians, who produced eclectic spectacles and intertwined their scenes with music. Revues were staged throughout the year and commented on daily life and political facts, either in small productions or in more luxurious versions. Also, theatrical revues which were created at the end of every year or the beginning of the following year, were often tasked with a responsibility to release new songs for Carnival's annual celebration in February or March.

After 1934, the number of radio stations increased in Brazil and radio singers adopted a theatrical revue singing style. New song releases marked Carnival festivities at the beginning of each year and helped feed the music industry for the rest of the year. The great popularity of radio programs from 1940 onwards propelled singers, musicians and arrangers to stardom as they started to appear on soundtracks and acted in films—and the same occurred with actors and comedians who belonged to theatrical revues.

In the 1950s, musical performances in different media continued to play a key role in reflecting and responding to Brazilian mass culture. Lenharo states:

Once casinos shut down [following legislation by president E. G. Dutra in 1946], theatrical revues and *chanchadas* joined radio in the divulgation of mass cultural production, although the latter kept a central, all-encompassing role. The triad radio–revues–chanchadas defined the activities of the record industry, music publishers, specialised magazines and advertising, as well as the music scene in Rio de Janeiro and other Brazilian capital cities. Singers, musicians, vaudeville performers, and radio actors fluidly circulated across all of those different cultural spheres. (135)

So the centrality of radio in 1940s and 50s Brazilian mass culture and in *chanchadas* was articulated by the film industry through a heavy reliance on countless musical numbers driving or accompanying film plots. These musicals responded to several non-cinematic stage practices associated with the record industry, including songs presented on the revues, singers' performances on the radio and the press star system and Carnival as a cultural fact intensely explored by various media.

The link between cinema and other forms of popular entertainment led to the consolidation of the *chanchada* as the most popular genre of Brazilian cinema. In these musical comedies, the carnivalesque connected the music, theatrical revue and *chanchada* with the carioca's daily problems; moreover, the presence of radio singers was essential to the popular appeal of the *chanchadas'* mix of music and humour. The musical numbers were accompanied by a plot with a weak narrative that had associations with vaudevillian origins. This structure, born in the revues and transferred to the cinema, included also histrionic acting, exaggerated gestures, theatrical songwriting and parodic plots. João Luiz Vieira has emphasised the importance of Carnival culture for the understanding of such musical comedies and their irregularities, whose vivacity presented connections between the record, radio, theatrical revue, the *chanchada* and the everyday cultural practices of the people who lived in Rio de Janeiro (*Hegemony*; “Brazil”; “Chanchada”).

Record labels developed close relationships with film producers and used *chanchadas* to publicise their songs, either well-known tunes or new releases, thus the films had a strong impact on singers' careers. Since musical numbers for *chanchadas* were linked to the

profitability of other media such as music discs and radio, films often adapted plots to accommodate these songs. The ability to stage musical numbers and integrate musicians and singers within the plots was a result of a collaboration between film industry professionals and music production companies. So, despite being structurally weak, these comedies were highly lucrative products for public consumption in the domestic market.

In some instances, songs were performed by actors with no training or talent; oftentimes, professionals from the radio industry were cast. In an interview by Lenharo, radio singer Jorge Goulart notes that musicians who took part in these musical comedies amused themselves with the cinematic experience at the film studios (115). At the same time, Goulart highlights that these musicians considered *Atlântida* a very professional environment, even if critics had attacked the films for being overly improvised (116). There was a culture that circulated around these productions, a production environment that promoted fun while working on the *chanchadas* as they were associated with the Carnival preparations. Despite a lack of skillful actors, participation had a significant impact on these singers and it was as important as being hired by record companies or invited on road tours (Lenharo 115). For singers, it was a commercial strategy, never becoming deeply involved in acting in the same way that actors and actresses without any musical background rarely developed singing careers. Even though they worked in revues and *chanchadas*, the filmmaking business was rarely a singer's primary source of income.

Song releases were played on radio stations and in theatrical revues, and within venues where musicians, singers and actors worked. Theatrical revues historically peaked in success and profitability in the 1950s, but had declined by the end of the decade. The 1950s witnessed a surge in popularity of traditional rhythms such as 1930s and 1940s sambas and *marchinhas* (a Carnival rhythm as popular as the samba, based on military marches but with a quicker rhythm, full of parody content and infectious lyrics) and the more modern northeast rhythms of *baião* and *xaxado*, rock, jazz and *Bossa Nova*. Singers gradually shifted from radio studios and auditoriums to small stages and recording studios. By the end of the decade, the popularity of live programmes in radio studios was replaced by the advent of television. Musical numbers in films reflected these new places and stages. The *chanchada* model would show signs of exhaustion and have its public popularity completely usurped by the television industry in the early 1960s.

Musical Numbers and Their Intermedial Connections

From 1940, Hollywood cinema began to integrate musical performances with the film's structure and plot. In Brazilian *chanchadas* though, the transformation towards more coherent plots did not eliminate the separation between the narrative and the musical numbers, so continued to be dismissed by film critics as lowbrow, low-quality films. In 1942, Pinheiro Lemos notes:

No one will dispute that in the Carnival films Brazilian cinema reaches its lowest level [...] from a poor technique to an annoying lack of imagination. In general, these films can be summarised as a messy group of popular songs, *marchas* and sambas, linked by a ridiculous and humorous plotline. Nothing there talks to sensibility or intelligence, in their careful and systematic denial of good taste and common sense. (qtd. in Freire, *Carnaval* 101)

In American musicals, the seemingly effortless connection between performers and everyday objects can be attributed to a technological know-how of the Hollywood industry. Conversely, Brazilian musical numbers were left exposed by the film production's engineered form and function. So, the Brazilian film industry could be inspired by the seamless execution of Hollywood musicals, yet their disparate technological approaches produced very different results for each cultural industry.

In relation to the role and position of musical numbers in the *chanchada* diegesis, radio singers were accompanied by orchestras or musical groups repeating situations that derived from music shows and with the orchestra positioned in the background. Many included a performance of samba or ballet dancers and chorus girls from theatrical revues. Other films established a stronger connection between musical numbers and the plot and dismissed the presence of diegetic orchestras and musicians altogether. Instead, they incorporated the actual career profession into a character type: skits with experienced performers from the theatrical revues, or singers performing as characters who were professional singers. The multiple ways through which musical numbers were presented point out one methodological question to be addressed: how can one fully understand a *chanchada* musical number without stressing, in each case, the overlap or presence of different types of practices on stage?

I will verify the way two musical numbers in *Tudo azul* are staged and filmed. The film tells the story of Ananias (Luiz Delfino), an insurance company worker who dreams of being recognised as a popular composer. His everyday routine is unbearable, he detests his job, he is often without enough subsistence to support his four children and his angry wife ridicules what he perceives as his true professional calling. He endures unsuccessful attempts at recording compositions and meeting with singers at radio stations. One evening and in desperation, he swallows a liquid poison and dreams of a world where famous artists compete to record his songs and his displeased wife is replaced by his beautiful work colleague, the secretary Maria Clara. The plot includes ten musical numbers performed on diegetic stages and in dream sequences. Famous radio singers (featured as themselves) appear alongside fictional characters, performed by well-established actors from both revues and cinema. Maria Clara is played by the famous Brazilian singer Marlene, and Ananias' wife is played by actress Laura Suarez. A romantic involvement in real life (followed by marriage and then divorce) between Delfino and Marlene was largely explored by the illustrated press. I will comment on two of the film musical numbers, the samba "Mundo de zinco" ("World of Zinc", a reference to the material used to build shantytown roofs), sang by radio singer Jorge Goulart, and the *marcha Sassaricando* ("Fooling Around"), sang by revue starlet Virgínia Lane.

Jorge Goulart and the Radio

The singer Jorge Goulart participated in many films. In *Tudo azul*, Goulart plays his actual radio singer persona, sings the samba "Mundo de zinco" (composed in 1951 by Nássara and Wilson Batista) and is accompanied by the group Regional de Dante Santoro inside a packed fictional auditorium. This performance occurs after Ananias has had an altercation with Goulart, who refuses to record a song the protagonist has written. The scene was shot in Continental, the record company where Goulart held an actual contract that year. In the film's diegesis, he is a fictional famous singer, but in the musical number, he also performs as himself, the famous singer Jorge Goulart. The scene is composed of twelve shots and is integrated within the plot. As Ananias exits the radio station, he overhears a loudspeaker playing the song "Mundo de zinco", which is performed by Goulart inside the auditorium, following what

Melo defines as the basic “agreement between musical film and the audience since the promise of showing great singers performing has to be fulfilled” by the film (*Argumento* 102). There is no narrative rupture between this scene and the previous: Goulart dismisses Ananias and next proceeds to perform. According to Melo, the musical number has a double status. It “creates a sense of isolation for Ananias, who is diegetically excluded from the scene” and at the same time is structured as a musical number occurring in a theatre (“Radio Stars” 149). Melo further stresses the metalinguistic nature of the scene:

When Jorge Goulart prepares to perform his musical number, we not only have a *star* before us: we know he is a singer committed to the commercial inner workings of the world of the radio, involving sponsorship and advertisements and that this influences his choice of songs, as well as his rejection of many others. The public, on the other hand, seems unaware of all this. (“Radio Stars” 149–50)

Therefore, the musical number is not simply an attraction: it has a critical attitude towards the world of showbiz which would explain the film’s positive critical reviews of the time, praising it for its acerbic dialogue between characters: “Ananias wants to be in the game, but he doesn’t know how to negotiate. Not being able to negotiate means to be ignored, and therefore, to end up excluded from the scene. This is what happens with Ananias” (Melo, *Argumento* 103).



Figure 1: Jorge Goulart sings “Mundo de zinco” (“World of Zinc”, Nássara and Wilson Batista, 1951) in the film *Tudo azul* (*It’s All Right*, Moacyr Fenelon, 1951). Flama Produtora Cinematográfica, 1951. Screenshot.

The camera is positioned behind the audience, pointing toward Goulart and the orchestra who are framed in a long shot (Figure 1). The camera is static while Goulart delivers the first part of the song’s lyrics with his famously potent voice, in a typical radio performance: performing a sing-along with the audience in a radio auditorium. By the second half of the song, the camera performs a reverse shot to show an enraptured audience participating with the singer and his song. Then the camera cuts back to a close-up shot of the singer which is

followed by a series of facial close-ups that focus on the singer and the flute player. This repetitive editing pattern does not match the dynamism of the samba, although the audience experiences the song in its entirety—something required for the broadcasting of a song by the radio. The song had just been previously recorded and released by Continental in 1951. In this scene, the audience's familiarity with both the singer and song is at once apparent and highlighted by the shot choices. Radio is also dominant in the visual arranging of the number: we are inside the radio stage auditorium, and for the musical group and the singer it is more important to be heard and recorded than to move around the stage. Therefore, in this performance of Goulart in which he addresses the diegetic audience and the cinematic spectator, the radio musical number dominates the film's visual style. The montage sequence alternates between close-ups of the artist and the band, and close-ups of the public at significant points in the song. No dramatic action occurs and there are no tracking shots which would otherwise indicate movement in the diegesis.

The chosen singers and their sometimes aesthetically weak filmed performances reveal the power of the Brazilian star system intertwined with the radio and phonographic industry which dominated cinema, both in terms of economic profits and popular influence. Musical numbers by radio singers in the *chanchadas*, although static, were immediately commented on by the illustrated magazines and press. By highlighting this musical number in *Tudo azul*, a set of external influences emerge which produce a hybrid of staging practices within these musical comedies.

Virgínia Lane and the Theatrical Revue

In the second half of the film, musical numbers occur in Ananias' dream and songs are performed by famous names of radio and theatrical revues: actress Virgínia Lane and singers Linda Batista, Blecaute, Dalva de Oliveira, Carmélia Alves, and Marlene (who plays Maria Clara). After obtaining a large salary and house rental rebate, Ananias receives a call from the board of directors of the insurance company to which he is employed. Here, they ask Ananias for a solution to the company's unprecedented number of premature client deaths, because they consider him to be the only existing poet with an understanding of popular taste. He is nominated as chief of the Department of Happiness after he remarks that there is a lack of singing and dancing in the community and this is the solution to a long-lasting, prosperous life. When the directors inquire about his methods to achieving this goal, Ananias simply assures the board he will use the appropriate channels. A musical number erupts onscreen as the carnivalesque tune "Sassaricando" is inserted into the score. It is enacted as a scene of a theatrical revue sung by Virgínia Lane but filmed with much more dynamism than the "Mundo de zinco" number. The number has no diegetic justification, and simply conveys a slight idea of happiness for Ananias. This pre-eminence of musical number over film plot reflects the structure and model of theatrical revues from the *chanchada* era.

In the 1940s and 50s, Walter Pinto, the most reputable entrepreneur of theatrical revues in Rio de Janeiro, presented elaborate plays in the Recreio theatre which he inherited from his father. Pinto transformed the variety format of revues into luxurious presentations replete with visual effects and beautiful women while aiming for a sophisticated style inspired by the Ziegfeld Follies. He hired comedians, nude models, chorus girls, ballerinas, *vedettes*, transvestites, girls, boys as well as singers and musicians. Elements from an erudite, elite culture (such as classical dance scenes, classical tunes presentations and references to classical literature) were often mixed with the irreverence of popular culture, including indecorous texts

filled with double meanings and political satires. This mixture was especially obvious in the musical numbers. Pinto's large scale and lavish productions, as well as the interactions between highbrow and lowbrow, were a source of inspiration for the *chanchadas*. One of these productions was the spectacle *Eu quero sassaricá* which premiered in mid-1951 and starred Oscarito and Virgínia Lane, one of the most famous *vedettes* (beautiful actresses who tempted the male audience with scant clothing) in the theatrical revue scene (Figure 2).



Figure 2: The facade of Recreio Theatre in Rio de Janeiro, where the revue *Eu quero sassaricá* (*I Want to Fool Around*) was shown between 1951 and 1952. Image from Walter Pinto Archives. Courtesy of Center of Documentation and Art / National Foundation of Arts (Cedoc/Funarte), Brazil.

The most significant number of the revue was “Eu quero sassaricá” in which Lane sang “Sassaricando”, a number composed for the play by Luís Antonio and J. Júnior. “Sassaricar” is a verb meaning to hang out, to chat here and there, to fool around. Released in the revue, the song quickly became a hit and was played many times per night (Figure 3). “Sassaricando” became the most played song on the radio after it was recorded by Virgínia Lane for Todamérica record company, two months after the film’s premiere (and five months before Carnival). In March 1952, this *marcha* was awarded the champion of Rio’s Town Hall annual contest of Carnival songs (“Teatro” 6). Lane had become the highest paid female actress of the Rio de Janeiro stage scene (“Virgínia Lane” 44).

Within this context, even though director Fenelon assigned Alinor Azevedo to write a realistic plot for *Tudo azul*, he also inserted musical numbers, like “Sassaricando”, that were not associated with the film’s diegesis. The film was shot in 1951 amidst the “Sassaricando” craze and helped to advertise the song for the upcoming Carnival in early 1952. Despite being part of Ananias’s strategy to promote happiness, the musical number conveys his ideas but is

not connected to the film's narrative, in which all of the tunes composed by Ananias resulted in huge hits and live performances.



Figure 3: Programme cover of the revue *Eu quero sassaricá* featuring Virgínia Lane and Oscarito. Image from Walter Pinto Archives. Courtesy of Center of Documentation and Art / National Foundation of Arts (Cedoc/Funarte), Brazil.

Virgínia Lane performs as she did for the revue and is joined by male chorus dancers, as well as actresses and actors from the theatre. They enact the widow, the girl, the soldier and the old guy who are mentioned in the lyrics—characters all seeking raunchy escapades. Lane appears in the background and moves towards the foreground, slowly dancing the *marchinha* and flanked by two rows of male dancers who move in simple step movements. The camera remains static and waits for Lane to approach in deep focus (Figure 4). This is intercut with medium shots of three display windows we have already seen to our left, every one of them featuring characters: the widow in a black bikini is harassed by a man, the schoolgirl is harassed by an old man and a woman with a baby is tempting a stranger. Their repeated gestures mimic the background actors within a theatrical revue. Framed in a close-up shot after a cut-in, Lane continues to sing while facing and withdrawing from the camera, always directing her gaze toward the spectators. She wears scant *vedette* clothing which was most likely similar to or the original one worn for the revue. Despite an immobile camera shot, she confronts the spectator as she did on stage, relying on the correspondence between the meaning of the lyrics and her rolling eyes. Although repetitive, “Sassaricando” is played in its entirety like the other numbers within the film, since the scene is designed to have the film audience singing along and feeling the experience of a theatrical revue. The repetition of actions, the scarcity of different shots in this musical number, and the persistent gaze toward the film spectator which breaks the fourth wall and alludes to the diegetic ambience, constitute a reflexive element by which a medium

appears as if it were other and calls attention to itself. The *chanchadas* repetitively trigger this reflexivity, which is crucial to understanding their value and by way of their imperfections and mixture of strategies, they always call attention to the production process.



Figure 4: Virgínia Lane sings and dances the march “Sassaricando” (“Fooling Around”, Luís Antonio and J. Júnior, 1951) in *Tudo azul*. Flama Produtora Cinematográfica, 1951. Screenshot.

These two musical number examples from *Tudo azul* reveal the connections between media and the ease by which artists shift from one to the next. These musical numbers also reveal how the seeming “immobility” or theatricality of actors connected to other stage practices does not negatively impact the film’s flow. If musical numbers were more popular than the films themselves, then it is necessary to analyse their significance beyond their connection to a film plot. For this reason, a historical analysis of these musical comedies must explore aspects external to the film production and exhibition and address the film analysis from a new vantage point.

As stated earlier, Charles Musser addresses the need for an integrated history of stages and screens and criticises the historiography that positions cinema at the centre of investigations and other cultural forms on the periphery. To Musser, “the film can be better understood within the bigger, richer and more complex environment of the theatre entertainment” (8). I also believe this works for *chanchadas* and their musical numbers. In this sense, it is necessary to take into consideration not only popular theatre but also Carnival’s social influences, as well as the logic of the music industry, the radio performances and the multimedia practices which occurred in film exhibitions and then reconsider the historical statements based on cinema specificity. Through a focused analysis of these two musical numbers, I want to suggest reducing the importance of films as an exclusive source of explanation for the stylistic and economic choices of these filmed musical numbers, so that we can better understand their connections within a wider cultural and historical context.

Note

¹ All of the translations from Portuguese are mine. Films and music titles were translated into English by me for clarity and do not correspond to any official international release name unless otherwise noted.

References

- Antonio, Luís, and J. Júnior. “Sassaricando” [“Fooling Around”]. *Todamérica*, 1951.
- Augusto, Sérgio. *Este mundo é um pandeiro, a chanchada de Getúlio a JK* [*This World is a Tambourine, Chanchada From Getúlio to JK*]. Cinemateca Brasileira/Companhia das Letras, 1989.
- Dennison, Stephanie, and Lisa Shaw. *Popular Cinema in Brazil, 1930–2001*. Manchester UP, 2004.
- Eu quero sassaricá* [*I Want to Fool Around*]. Directed by Walter Pinto, 1951.
- Freire, Rafael de Luna. “A conversão para o cinema sonoro no Brasil e o mercado exibidor na década de 1930” [“The Evolution Towards Sound Film in Brazil and the Exhibitor Market in the 1930s”]. *Significação*, vol. 40, no. 40, 2013, pp. 29–51.
- . *Carnaval, mistério e gângsters: o filme policial no Brasil (1915–1951)* [*Carnival, Mystery and Gangsters: The Police Film in Brazil (1915–1951)*]. 2011. Universidade Federal Fluminense, PhD dissertation.
- Gomes, Paulo Emilio Salles. “Panorama do cinema brasileiro: 1896/1966” [“Panorama of Brazilian Cinema: 1896/1966”]. *Cinema: Trajetória no subdesenvolvimento* [*Cinema: A Trajectory within Underdevelopment*]. 2nd ed., Paz e Terra, 1996, pp. 19–83.
- Lenharo, Alcir. *Cantores do rádio* [*Radio Singers*]. Editora da Unicamp, 1995.
- Melo, Luis Alberto Rocha. *Argumento e roteiro: o escritor de cinema Alinor Azevedo* [*Plot and Screenplay: The Screenwriter Alinor Azevedo*]. 2006. Universidade Federal Fluminense, Master Dissertation.
- . “Radio Stars on Screen: Critiques of Stardom in Moacyr Fenelon’s *Tudo Azul* (1952)”. *Stars and Stardom in Brazilian Cinema*, edited by Tim Bergfelder, Lisa Shaw, and João Luiz Vieira, Berghahn, 2017, pp. 144–61.
- Musser, Charles “Towards a History of Theatrical Culture: Imagining an Integrated History of Stage and Screen.” *Screen Culture: History and Textuality*, edited by John Fullerton, John Libbey Eurotext, 2004, pp. 3–19.
- Nássara, and Wilson Batista. “Mundo de zinco” [“World of Zinc”]. *Continental*, 1951.

- Schwarzman, Sheila. “Cultura popular massiva: O lugar do cinema sonoro e sua relação com a música popular” [“Massive Popular Culture: The Place of Talkies and Their Relationship with Popular Music”]. *Ícone*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2008, pp. 77–99.
- Shaw, Lisa. “The Brazilian *Chanchada* and Hollywood Paradigms (1930–1959).” *Framework*, vol. 44, no. 1, Spring 2003, pp. 70–83.
- . “The *Chanchada* and Celluloid Visions of Brazilian Identity in the Vargas Era (1930–45).” *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2000, pp. 63–74, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13507490050020969>.
- “O teatro de revistas e as músicas populares” [“Theatrical Revues and Popular Songs”]. *A noite*, 3 Nov. 1953, p. 6.
- Tudo azul [It's All Right]*. Directed by Moacyr Fenelon, Flama Produtora Cinematográfica, 1951.
- Viany, Alex. *Introdução ao cinema brasileiro*. Ministério da Educação e Cultura, 1959.
- Vieira, João Luiz. “A chanchada e o cinema carioca (1930–1950)” [“*Chanchada* and Carioca Cinema (1930–1950)”]. *Nova história do cinema brasileiro v.1*, edited by Fernão Ramos and Sheila Schwarzman, Sesc, 2018, pp. 345–91.
- . “Brazil.” *The International Film Musical*, edited by Corey K. Creekmur & Linda Y. Mokdad, Edinburgh UP, 2012, pp. 141–54.
- . *Hegemony and Resistance: Parody and Carnival in Brazilian Cinema*. 1984. New York University, PhD dissertation.
- “Virgínia Lane”. *Manchete*, 14 Mar. 1953, p. 44.

Suggested Citation

Costa, Flávia Cesarino. “Building an Integrated History of Musical Numbers in Brazilian *Chanchadas*.” *Alphaville: Journal of Film and Screen Media*, no. 19, 2020, pp. 13–27, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33178/alpha.19.02>.

Flávia Cesarino Costa is a professor of Film History and Theory in the Department of Art and Communication at Federal University of São Carlos, Brazil. She has a PhD in Semiotics from the Catholic University of São Paulo and is the author of *O primeiro cinema: espetáculo, narração, domesticação* [*Early Cinema: Spectacle, Narration, Domestication*] (2000). As a Co-Investigator for the Project “Towards an Intermedial History of Brazilian Cinema: Exploring Intermediality as a Historiographic Method”, she currently researches Brazilian cinema and its connections with other media until the 1950s.