

A Popular Brazilian Music?

Keywords

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Tropicália.

This article considers how four different authors remember the cultural movement of the 1960s. More specifically, it delves into the musical landscape in Brazil during the military dictatorship from 1964 to 1968. From Bossa Nova, to Tropicalia, to a so called "*música popular Brasileira (MPB)*", a number of academics have investigated how these musical traditions are related to diverse conceptions of national identity. Assessing the works of Roberto Schwarz, David Treece, Christopher Dunn and Sean Stroud, this article demonstrates an unanimous agreement about the lasting effects of the Tropicalia movement of 1968 on the national consciousness. While Treece argues it demonstrates the disillusionment of leftist artists, Schwarz poses that the movement sought to highlight contradictions of this time. Moreover, Dunn and Stroud argue that the musical movements of 1968 are intricately related to the rise of both a single national music — MPB — as well as that of a vibrant counterculture.

INTRODUCTION

The year 1968 in Brazil marks the beginning of the “anos de chumbo”. When President Artur da Costa e Silva signed the Fifth Institutional Act on December 13th, colloquially known as AI-5, one of the obvious targets were artists. Following years of intense cultural production inspired by the national political climate and disseminated by modern technologies such as the radio and television, the authoritarian state lost its tolerance for the political activism that prevailed among cultural and intellectual circles. Concurrently, 1968 also marks the beginning of what Zuenir Ventura called a “vazio cultural” (cultural void) in Brazil — a perceived drop in creative production following the great artistic expressions of the 1960s. It is interesting to consider the “sixties” as a cultural period in Brazil which ends in 1968 with the demise of the prominence of Bossa Nova among the urban youth, the failure of the politicized “Canção de Protesto” movement to garner support from the peasant and working classes, and the short-lived but legendary experience of the Tropicália movement. Moreover, after decades of intellectual debate about the existence of a unique Brazilian national culture, a musical genre called música popular brasileira (MPB) gains prominence after 1968.

This article will analyze how four different authors interpret the “sixties” as a cultural period which ended in 1968. It will consider Roberto Schwarz’s classic 1970 essay on “Culture and Politics, 1964 - 1969” — one of the first critiques of the Tropicalist movement — to discuss immediate reactions to the cultural changes that occurred in 1968. It will then turn to the work of David Treece, who assesses the tensions musicians who attempted to create a popular music of protest in the sixties faced in their articulations of an “authentic” Brazilian people in his essay “Guns and Roses”. Next, Christopher Dunn’s book, *Brutality Garden : Tropicália and the Emergence of a Brazilian Counterculture*, will be used to understand Tropicália as a movement which challenged

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dominant constructions of national culture. Lastly, this essay will consider Sean Stroud's *The Defence of Tradition in Brazilian Popular Music: Politics, Culture and the Creation of Musica Popular Brasileira*, an ambitious book which demonstrates the construction of MPB as an authentic and legitimate musical tradition after 1968. Since these readings cover a broad range of topics and discussions that influenced the musical history of Brazil around 1968, the essay will be limited in scope so as to offer a critical analysis of current historiography.

This essay will attempt to understand how these authors remember the tropicalist movement of 1968 and its relationship to conceptions of national identity. It will consider each author individually and assess the strengths and limitations of both their arguments and methodologies. When appropriate, commonalities and differences will be drawn between the pieces to comment on broader trends in the scholarship on the topic over time.

EARLY INTERPRETATIONS OF TROPICÁLIA AND 1968

Roberto Schwarz's essay "Culture and Politics, 1964 - 1969" was included in this literature review because of its historical value as an early interpretation of the defining music of 1968: Tropicália. Since Schwarz does not offer a succinct definition of the movement — as it was still in its embryonic stages — I will use Christopher Dunn's definition throughout the essay. According to Dunn, Tropicália or *tropicalismo* was a cultural movement that coalesced in 1968 as a result of collaborations between musicians from Bahia such as Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil, Gal Costa, Tom Zé, Torquato Neto, José Carlos Capinan and vanguard artists from industrial São Paulo. While the movement gained visibility in late 1967 in the famous song festivals, the most formal articulation of the movement was provided by the 1968 concept album *Tropicalia ou circus et pannis*.

As this movement directly challenged dominant conceptions of national identity and "*dismantled binaries that maintained neat distinctions between high and low, traditional and modern, national and international cultural production*" it faced criticism from both the conservative, patriotic regime and anti-imperialist left (Dunn, 2009,

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p. 3). Roberto Schwarz is a Marxist literary critic. As a member of the leftist Brazilian intellectual circle, he wrote this essay between 1969 and 1970 while in exile. Including a literature critique who was formally part of the discussions surrounding anti-imperialism and class-structure during the period offers a unique opportunity to comment on the legacy of 1968. This text is also an example of leftist self-critiques which dominated cultural and intellectual production in and about Brazil. The piece included a disclaimer in which Schwarz acknowledges the presence of *"passages that have been proven false by time and events"* but believes those mistakes *"must be allowed to speak for themselves"* (SCHWARTZ, 1992, p. 1).

Some of his greatest contributions to intellectual discourse include asserting the "cultural hegemony of the left" in Brazil. Schwarz specifies that this dominance

"appears to be concentrated in the groups which are directly involved in ideological production, such as students, artists, journalists, some sociologists and economists" and that "the only truly radical material produced by this group is for its own consumption - which is in itself a substantial market" (Schwarz, 1992, pp. 8-9).

All other authors considered in this essay also refer to Schwarz in their pieces, often to limit the scope of their discussions on the "popular" appeal of music during the sixties to the middle class. This is an interesting limitation that permeates most scholarship about popular music during the military dictatorship: historians continue to focus on the middle class while failing to compile sources which accurately account for the tastes of other social classes.

Schwarz was the first to analyze the powerful use of allegories by artists in the tropicalist movement. By juxtaposing images of the archaic cultural emblems to expressions of urban modernity, tropicalists, Schwarz conceded, were able to *"capture the hardest and most difficult contradictions of the present intellectual production"* (Schwarz, 1992, p. 25). However, the author

feared that the use of the tropicalist allegory would represent Brazil as an absurdity and construct an “atemporal idea of Brazil” in which the nation’s historical contradictions became symbols of its national identity. This prescription, made merely a few years after the demise of the formal tropicalist movement, seems inadequate when considering the important influence this new musical style would have on future generations and their own articulations of protest and dissent (this point is particularly driven forward by Dunn as will later be explored).

As Christopher Dunn analyses in his book *Brutality Garden*, there are some inconsistencies with Schwarz’s argument especially in regards to the role of artists during the 1960s. In setting up his argument, Schwarz draws a parallel between the educational programs of Paulo Freire (who practices his proposed libertarian theology through literacy efforts in the Northeast of Brazil). Dunn writes that “*This comparison seems to overlook the differences between work of activists engaged in popular education and artists elaborating projects of aesthetic renovation and cultural critique within the realm of mass media*” (Dunn, 2009, p. 99). That Schwarz conflated the role of the two is not surprising when contextualizing the tropicalist movement in a time where the revolutionary power of culture was taken at face value by leftist circles. The next author further assesses the impetus of the cultural left to mobilize the Brazilian people.

BOSSA NOVA AND POLITICAL DISILLUSIONMENT

David Treece’s article “Guns and Roses: Bossa Nova and Brazil’s Music of Popular Protest, 1958 - 1968” aims to assess how music played an “*an active role in expressing the interests and aspirations of the movement for social and political change*” (Treece, 1997, p. 2). Treece outlines the musical history of bossa nova, a dissonant avant-garde musical tradition that grew out of the Zona Sul in Rio de Janeiro during the 1950s. This musical style, created by Vinicius de Moraes and Tom Jobim was popular both domestically and internationally, coming to be portrayed as a symbol of Brazilian identity since it combines “modern” jazz with “traditional” Afro-Brazilian *samba*. He engages with this musical tradition to assess how the leftist intelligentsia sought to create a protest song movement that generated a politically conscious

“imagined popular audience” in the early sixties. (Treece, 1997, p. 4). Treece ultimately concludes that

In the absence of any politically articulated community of interests, that is to say, in the absence of a viable popular movement with its own coherent alternative to the regime’s strategy of state capitalist modernization, the traditional left could express little more than its own frustrated idealism and that of its middle-class audience (TREECE, 1997, p. 28).

The article’s class-based critique thus marks 1968 as the final year of the failed experiment of the protest song movement and draws a direct link between Tropicália and the revolutionary efforts of the left.

The most significant contribution of this article is the in-depth analysis of how artists like Carlos Lyra, Sergio Ricardo, Geraldo Vandré, Baden Powell, Vinicius de Moraes, and Edu Lobo reconstituted the bossa nova musical tradition during the early sixties. Shifting away from the “ecological rationality” and “domestic intimacy” of classic bossa nova, which Treece argued was “*an expression of the cozy bourgeois complacency of post-War Rio’s residential beach quarters and apartment blocks*”, these artists were influenced by the political polarization of Joao Jango Goulart’s administration. (Treece, 1997, p. 11) Treece discusses the creation of the Popular Culture Center (CPC), and their mobilization of cultural forces to create a “*revolutionary, popular art [which] might transform the political consciousness of its audience so as to challenge the prevailing ideas*” (Treece, 1997, p. 13). CPC’s “formula” for a national protest music sought to bridge the social distance between the artistic vanguard and the “popular” masses (working class and peasant communities) by integrating traditional form with revolutionary content.

In Treece’s analysis of how artists like Carlos Lyra and Sergio Ricardo integrated traditions like *samba de morro* (that is, *samba* originated in the favelas), he critically assesses how the artist’s socioeconomic status limited their work’s appeal to audiences outside their

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social circles (the middle class). He writes that

Like the 'poor little rich girl' of the Lyra/Moraes composition, 'Pobre menina rica', the radicalised bourgeois intellectual-artist was trapped inside an inescapable social identity of illusory wealth and privilege, which were, of course, not illusory at all, but constituted real obstacles in the way of a genuinely classless, 'popular' solidarity (TREECE, 1997, p. 16).

The author thus recognizes the contradictions in this new musical style which sought to bridge "the city and the favela" in fact highlighted the social distance between the two groups. He contextualizes this growing alienation in an increasingly industrialized and commercial society experiencing the stark growth of urban populations and the expansion of mass media. This analysis thus offers a great critical assessment of how class structure affects the protest song movement and, more importantly, it demonstrates one of the causes of the disillusionment that brought Tropicália to fame in 1968.

Trecee does not directly engage with the Tropicália movement in this essay. As he writes, "*a more detailed analysis of the Tropicalists' work falls outside the scope of this article, other than to give an indication of the impact of their performances on the sectarian atmosphere of the 1968 Globo festival*" (Treece, 1997, p. 26). However, the author seems to identify in 1968 a fertile ground for a musical style able to articulate the inherent tensions the traditional left faced in during this early period of artistic resistance. It seems that Tracee believes that it is precisely because Tropicalists identify "*the complexities and contradictions of the new cultural climate of the 'Economic Miracle', and its combination of repression and massification*", that they were able to influence the next generation of protest music (TREECE, 1997, p. 26).

It is surprising that Treece's analysis lacks any discussion about the role of race in the musical developments of the sixties — especially since the "popular masses" the left intelligentsia sought to recruit

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were black or mixed race. The author understands the choice of artists like Baden Powell, Vinicius de Moraes, and Edu Lobo to incorporate Afro-Brazilian musical traditions like the *samba de roda*, *candomble*, and *berimbau* as a tool to invoke “a sense of collective identity in the communion of prayer, and also to mobilize its initiates for the struggles of life” (Treece, 1997, p. 21). However, he does not recognize the possible negative reactions black or mixed race audiences may have towards the appropriation of their traditional music. As the article was published in 1997, it is possible that issues around cultural appropriation were not part of his analysis because it was not an integral part of the intellectual debate of the time. On the other hand, this choice may also indicate a reflection of the cultural sensibilities of the sixties: while criticisms around class were prominent, the ethnoracial field in the 60s was still dominated by the myth of the Brazilian “racial democracy” (elaborated by sociologist Gilberto Freyre). Regardless of the motivation behind the author’s choice, the lack of a racial analysis of the protest song movement limits the author’s understanding of the popular appeal of artists engaged in a political form of cultural production.

TROPICÁLIA AND RISING RACIAL CONSCIOUSNESS

In *Brutality Garden: Tropicália and the Emergence of a Brazilian Counterculture*, Christopher Dunn delves into the rise and demise of the Tropicalist movement. In doing so, the author contextualizes the rise of *tropicalismo* in 1968 alongside prominent debates around modernity, nationality, and internationalism in Brazilian cultural and intellectual circles. Because of the broader scope of his analysis, he can integrate the main arguments of both Schwarz and Treece in his book. For example, Dunn writes that With the growth of urban populations and the expansion of mass media, it became difficult to reconcile the popular with traditional associations with rural folklore. Nor could the “popular” be defined solely by the imperatives of political consciousness-raising as the CPC had proposed (DUNN, 2001, p. 68).

This point is particularly clear after reading Treece, who outlines the incompatibilities of traditional interpretations of “popular.” Additionally, as both Treece and — to some extent — Schwarz articulate, Dunn understands the “*cultural manifestations associated with*

Tropicália ... [as] an expression of crisis among artists and intellectuals" (DUNN, 2001, p. 74).

However, Dunn differs from both of these authors because he pays close attention to the effects of Tropicália on the cultural production of the 1970s and 1980s. He writes that *"In retrospect, the promulgation of AI-5 and the subsequent denouncement of the tropicalist movement seemed to have marked the end of the "sixties" as a cultural period in Brazil"* (Dunn, 2001, p. 149). However, he is highly perceptive to how the structure and ethos of these artists continued to permeate in the next two decades. In the second portion of his book, the author draws a bridge between this movement and the emergence of an urban counter-culture after 1968. The key aspect of this counter-culture, known colloquially as the "desbunde," is that it questioned the very notion of a unifying "national culture" through its aesthetics.

In my opinion, the most important contribution of *Brutality Garden* lies in its considerations of race throughout the book. Though somewhat lacking in the first half of the book (though the section The Mestizo Paradigm offered strong context), racial analyses are pertinent in the second half of the book as the author attempts to understand why questions of race became pertinent in middle-class circles in the 1970s and 1980s. It is important to emphasize once again that the discussion here continues to refer to a young and urban middle class. Dunn (2001, p. 155) recognizes that

"the radical social and cultural movements of the early 1960s had attempted to introduce a class-based critique but were limited by paternalistic, and at times, ethnocentric populism"

(keep in mind this further contextualizes the lack of discussion on racial issue in Schwarz's 'Culture and Politics'). To understand the shift in ideological preoccupations, Dunn employs an interesting analytical tool: outlining the dominant intellectual currents in both national and international political fields.

This is particularly poignant when considering sociologist Tianna Paschel's argument that the alignment

of a fractured national ethnoracial field and a consolidated global ethnoracial field allowed for the success of black struggles in Brazil during the 1970s (Paschel, 2018). As described by Treece, the dominant discourse around “popular culture” during the sixties was in crisis following the failure of the protest song movement and the institution of AI-5. In the 1970s, however,

Dunn shows how “*Young Afro-Brazilians appropriated these cultural products [from African-Americans and African diasporas] and icons to challenge the nationalist ethos of brasilidade, which tended to obfuscate racial discrimination and inequality by exalting the mestico ethos*” (Dunn, 2001, 178).

The influence of this intellectual movement on tropicalist artists — notably on Gilberto Gil and Milton Nascimento — conditioned musicians to more readily engage with issues related to not only race but gender and sexual orientation as well. Identifying the prominence of racial discourse in music post-1968, Dunn would likely agree with Tianna Paschel’s sociological framework.

Dunn also explores, like most academics on this topic, the connection between the events of 1968 and the youth’s conception of “national identity.” As he outlines in the first part of the book, the idea of a unitary national culture was challenged by the changing dynamics of the 1960s.

The very notion of a unitary “Brazilian culture” became untenable due, in part, to the tropicalist intervention. By undermining prevailing notions of authenticity, it opened up new directions in popular music and ushered in diverse countercultural practices that were in dialogue with the related phenomena in the international sphere (DUNN, 2001, p. 214).

The ability of hybrid-style of tropicalist movement to engage with transnational cultural flows which denounced racial inequality and articulated a black collective identity in the 1970s led to the rise of an urban counterculture that tended to identify more with racial minorities than with the previously abstract conception of a Brazilian “povo.” Though outside the scope of this essay, Dunn further explores the connections between this emerging Brazilian counterculture and the social and political movements of the late 1970s in his most recent book *Contracultura: Alternative Arts and Social Transformation in Authoritarian Brazil*.

THE MIDDLE CLASS AND THE PERPETUATION OF AN AUTHENTIC MPB

In *The Defence of Tradition in Brazilian Popular Music: Politics, Culture and the Creation of Música Popular Brasileira*, Sean Stroud explores the symbolic role of MPB in contemporary Brazil. Like Dunn, Stroud is interested in the effects of 1968 on national culture throughout the 1970s and 1980s. His analysis, however, pays close attention to the consolidation of música popular Brasileira (MPB) as an authentic and legitimate expression of national culture. MPB is a genre of music that emerged in the late 1960s through the televised music contests. While it includes a number of tropicalist artists like Gilberto Gil, Caetano Veloso, and Gal Costa, it also made up of other like Elis Regina, Edu Lobo, Chico Buarque, Milton Nascimento, Geraldo Vandré, Maria Bethânia, João Bosco, Jorge Ben, Geraldo Azevedo, Ivan Lins, Alceu Valença and Simone. Its chameleon-like ability was highly influenced by Tropicália’s challenge posed to traditional conceptions of popular music in Brazil. As Stroud writes:

The impact of the revolutionary performances by Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso at the televised 1967 TV Record song festival ensured that MPB would never be the same: elements of Tropicalist experimentalism and a rock sensibility were gradually incorporated into MPB, even as

Tropicália itself withered away (STROUD, 2018, ch. 1).

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While one must be careful not to conflate the two movements, there is a clear connection in this new national consciousness between *tropicalismo* and MPB after 1968. The author describes how the Tropicália “*rapidly came to be viewed retrospectively rather nostalgically as a reference point for innovation and audacity*” (Stroud, 2008, ch. 1). The memory of 1968 is particularly interesting to the author who constructs his argument around the legitimation of this new musical genre in post-1968 Brazil.

Because the author was less concerned with changing musical structures, his methodology differs significantly from that of Roberto Schwarz. Even though both authors are highly interested in the role of the middle class and the music industry on the development of an authentic national culture, they look 1968 from different perspectives. While Schwarz understands it as the end of the revolutionary experiment of the left to create a protest song music, Stroud looks at 1968 as the starting point of a period of “intense cultural activity” that was mediated by a growing industry. The scope and medium of their research further conditions their methodologies: it sometimes seems unfair to compare articles to books since they are much more limited by size. However, it is clear that Schwarz was more interested in the manipulations of musical structures and styles by politicized musicians hungry for revolution. Thus, it is unsurprising that his essay largely incorporates musical analysis to exemplify this evolution. Since Dunn dedicates a large portion of his book to the changing musical traditions that conflated in the Tropicália movement, his analysis also includes formal analysis of songs. He focused much more on the lyrical developments of *tropicalismo* while Schwarz emphasized changes to the musical form.

All of these authors, however, include considerations of classic critiques from Mario de Andrade, Roberto Schwarz, and other pertinent cultural critics. Notably, Stroud looks at these works with a highly critical view. Since “*particular emphasis was placed on the several interlocking roles of actors such as the press, the record industry, television networks, researchers and the state*”, his work was more nuanced in that it sought to demonstrate

how these forces consolidated música popular Brasileira as a legitimate representation of “national culture” after 1968. As he writes:

That MPB has been assigned this role is due to several interconnected factors; the most important of which are the support and investment given to MPB by the record industry and the press, and the fact that for many years MPB was a cultural form that embodied political, artistic and social values that encapsulated for many the essence of the national (STROUD, 2008).

Stroud thus demonstrates how this musical tradition was a result of its alliance with the record industry and the press: that is, the upper and middle class (Stroud, 2008). As a result of his insightful exploration of the music industry and its growing relationship with television, Stroud affirms that “*the middle-class identity of MPB is the key to its hegemonic status*” (Stroud, 2008):

I have argued that MPB represents the concerted effort of a specific class within Brazilian society to define and express itself. That MPB was profoundly bound up with the history of the Brazilian middle class from the mid 1960s onwards is evident from its consumer profile, its political and ideological importance (during the period of the military dictatorship), and the various persistent interventions in support of MPB by actors such as the ‘musical class’, researchers and critics.

Stroud thus identifies the essential support of this ‘musical class’ — the gatekeepers of national culture representing dominant market and state forces — to the creation of MPB’s symbolic meaning as the true emblem of national culture in the remaining years of the military regime. Stroud’s interpretation of the legacy of 1968 on conceptions of national identity and culture is quite different than that of Dunn’s. While *Brutality Garden* and *Contracultura* understand 1968 as the beginning of the racially conscious urban counterculture in Brazil, with the Tropicalist proclamation of a ‘universal sound,’ Stroud sees it as the beginning of a new nationalist project ultimately led by the middle class.

CONCLUSION

The Tropicália movement of 1968 has lasting effects on the national consciousness. The disillusionment of leftist artists during the changing sixties was captured by David Treece's "Guns and Roses". In the midst of rapid urban migration, industrialization, and commercialization, the Tropicália movement articulated the constant contradictions of this time through its use of allegory, first analyzed by Roberto Schwarz. In their books, Christopher Dunn and Sean Stroud consider the legacies of 1968 in relation to the development of a vibrant urban counterculture and the construction of a legitimized representation of national culture: MPB.

In his conclusion, Sean Stroud (2008) writes:

At the same time it is important to note the contradiction between the historical, ideological function of MPB as a 'national treasure' and the fact that not only is there a striking lack of support for Brazilian popular music at the state, institutional and academic levels but also that beyond the confines of the middle class the wider Brazilian public now appear to have minimal interest in the importance of MPB as a symbol of national identity.

The author's prediction that MPB would be rejected as a legitimate expression of a "popular" culture begs for more research. As such, further exploration of this topic should assess how MPB is seen by contemporary Brazilians, especially in the context of the recent 2018 presidential elections. As the country is currently experiencing a political crisis of comparable intensity to that of the sixties, the dominant conceptions of national identity today are once again being challenged.

TIMELINE

1930 - 1945: Getúlio Vargas' regime, populist representations of *samba-exaltação* dominate national and international conceptions of Brazilian identity.

1950s: Rise of Bossa Nova, an Avante-garde movement created by Tom Jobim, Vinicius de Moraes, and Joao Gilberto Gilberto in the Zona Sul of Rio, it combined *samba* with foreign jazz influences; television introduced to Brazil.

1958: Manifesto of São Paulo's concrete poets published.

1960 August: appearance of first Brazilian rock magazine, marks formal consolidation of U.S. rock'n'roll in the Brazilian market.

1962: Centro Popular de Cultura (CPC), a left-wing cultural organization, created by leaders of União Nacional de Estudantes (UNE) alongside left-wing artists, writers, and musicians to produce and disseminate "popular revolutionary art"; November 21, Bossa Nova concert in New York's Carnegie Hall.

1962 - 1963: CPC takes cultural productions on tour through remote areas of the country.

1964 April 1st: Coup d'Etat removes President Joao 'Jango' Goulart from power and institutes a military regime.

1964: Show Opinião launched at the beginning of military dictatorship, articulates dissenting opinions and celebrations of folk music.

1965: TV Globo, a new station, emerges with financial and technical support from military regime and American Time-Life media conglomerate; rise of televised song contests on TV Excelsior, TV Record and TV Globo.

1965 - 1968: TV Record releases television programme, O Fino da Bossa, with Elis Regina and Jair Rodriguez.

1967 March: Artur da Costa e Silva and hard-liners

in military assume control, intensification of armed opposition.

1967 July 17: March Against the Electric Guitar led by musicians of Música Popular Brasileira (MPB).

1968 March 28: military police shot Edison Luis in Rio de Janeiro during mass student demonstrations.

1968 June: Passeata dos Cem Mil brings many sectors of civil society including leading MPB artists to the streets of downtown Rio de Janeiro.

1968 July: Tropicália Ou Panis et Circenses released by a coalition of vanguard artists

1968 September: Finals of Third International Song Festival, "Caminhando" by Geraldo Vandre commands an audience of 30,000 but is denied the first prize.

1968 December 13: President de Silva e Costa institutes institutional Act 5 in response to further polarization, marks the beginning of the "anos de chumbo".

1968 December: Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso are exiled marking the formal end of the Tropicália movement.

1968 - 1973: 'Economic Miracle' under military dictatorship, technologies like television and radio become widely available.

1970s: growth of MPB market and rise of a counterculture in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.

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