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Salvador da Bahia, Brazil had always been a musical wonderland that I romanticized about from my Chapel Hill dorm room. Salvador, situated in the state of Bahia is the musical epicenter of Brazil, immersed with African culture, a consequence of its history as the entry point for generations of African slaves. Having always had an interest in musical anthropology and the African musical diaspora, this particular manifestation of African culture was irresistibly fascinating in how music and its African roots are so intertwined with nearly every facet of Salvadoran life.

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SOUTH AMERICA



STUDYING THE MUSICAL ROOTS OF AN AFRO-BRAZILIAN CULTURE IN SALVADOR DA BAHIA

Upon arriving, my host father immediately hoisted me out the door for a comprehensive tour of the immediate neighborhood. He herded me along the ocean-side street sputtering in rapid-fire Portuguese to me and literally every other surfer or vendor. Actually SEEING the beach's Portuguese fortresses with which Google image had so excited my imagination was a thrill ... as was the whole trip. My first week was spent acclimating myself to the food, the weather, and the language.

I spent the mornings in a Portuguese language school, immersed in the melodically swooping 'Bahian' dialect. After a few weeks, I had quickly developed a love for my favorite Amazon fruits and for Portuguese conversation. I also enrolled in a music school to learn how to play a little bit of the music that I was hearing. My teacher was less than punctual, but learning the Brazilian cavaquinho (the parent of the Hawai'ian ukulele) was great as a hands-on tool to understanding the music. When I wasn't studying Portuguese, I was embarking on project-related tasks which consisted of seeking out live music in any way I could. The samba parties at the Mercado Modelo, the Tuesday-night city-sponsored downtown live music, and a host of other musical gatherings were usually marked by a conspicuous gringo from UNC with his tape recorder handy. The bread and butter of my project was to be the interviews, which demanded a conversational competence of the language, and to that end I resolved to speak with everyone. Police officers, shopkeepers, shady dreaded beachrats who might have been better to avoid - they were all fair game.

One day my host father spied a marquee on his moped advertising an instrumental music festival. Knowing of my burgeoning obsession with Brazilian music, he relayed this information to me and I attended

the following week only to have my ears blown away. After the concert I excitedly approached the festival organizer with a rehearsed Portuguese spiel about my project. He agreed to an interview. This contact became a pivotal entry into Salvador's musical scene and my contacts began building with a string of interviews won by touting my association to the previous interviewee. Mere interview sessions resulted in a slew of unpredicted bonuses such as a recording session, a public performance, and permanent friendships.

Fortunately for me, my project coincided with a uniquely Northeastern Brazilian festival, second only in importance to Carnival, in which music is tantamount. The month-long affair in June, the São João festival, culminates with massive concerts playing the festival's soundtrack: the musical style of Forró (Fuh-Ho) music. As the days neared that much-anticipated June 24th celebration, Forró began blasting out



of more shops, the traditional little São João flags began adorning more edifices, and more food stands began popping up with the festival's traditional cuisine. I took an excursion

into the interior where the most orchestrated festivities take place and witnessed throngs of dancing Brazilians for three nights. Forró boasts the least African influence of any music I studied yet is identifiably Bahian and crucial to understanding the complexity of Salvador's musical

culture.

After my formal language study I dedicated the last month to vigorously pursuing interview contacts and soaking up as much music as I could. I'd spend the mornings curled up in the nook of a library containing exclusively literature concerning Afro-Brazilian



music and culture. By noon (closing time), the librarian would kick me out with uncharacteristic Brazilian punctuality and I was off to convince musicians, cultural

educators, and dance instructors that they should do interviews with me. I would come home with a tape recorder full of interviews or music and crash. The nights would be filled with excursions to concerts, shows, live samba or the like with friends who I had kept from the language school.

The project was really just being there. One can see African influences in almost every aspect of life. The Bahian accent owes its intonation to the tonal West African languages spoken amongst the first slaves. The intestinal-taxing 'Dende' oil used in many foods comes from Africa. The people bear African ancestry, the music exhibits African aesthetics - the list is really endless. I've never felt such an absolute immersion. There is no culture like Salvador anywhere else on the planet. The emergence of a strongly African-identifying populace yet with traces of indigenous and European cultural influence grounded in the Brazilian experience, is endlessly fascinating to me. I feel like I could study it the rest of my life and only be scraping the surface. Mr. Burch has changed my life with his generosity. This experience has let me cultivate my interests and shaped what I intend to study, how, and what I want to do in life. That wouldn't have been possible without Mr. Burch and the Burch Fellows Program.