

Performing Rhythms of the Brazilian Bateria

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Abstract

Bateria (bah-teh-REE-ah) means drum set in Portuguese. In terms of Brazilian samba music, the bateria is the percussion ensemble driving the groove of the whole samba band. Organizing a *batucada* (bah-tooKAH-dah), a Brazilian percussion jam session, is possible in general music classes throughout elementary and secondary school. The necessary instruments are easily available through percussion and educator websites. In addition, quality online tutorials are easily accessible.

Keywords

Brazil, percussion, bateria, samba, batucada

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A Brief History of Samba Music

Brazilian music has many cultural influences, including indigenous practices, Portuguese by way of colonization for three centuries, and a strong presence of West African sounds. The latter is due to the fact that more than four million West Africans of mostly Yoruba and Bantu-Ewe cultural groups were brought to Brazil as slaves, with a large number of people from Angola, also a Portuguese colony during slavery.

A living music tradition with its roots in West African music culture is samba. Samba music easily moves between folk and popular music in Brazil. Composers regularly incorporate older tunes into contemporary arrangements. This practice is prevalent enough that truly discerning a song's origin is a complicated process. Contemporary samba is learned and performed in the *escolas de samba* (schools of samba), which are communities of dancers and musicians, with variations between regions both rural and urban. Their purpose is exclusively devoted to the development of *Carnaval* parades as part of the preparation for the season of Lent, typically found wherever the Catholic church was involved in colonization (Howard & Kelley, 2018).

The Bateria

The bateria is the percussion band of a samba school. Typically, the most powerful rhythmic energy in a *Carnaval*

procession emanates from the bateria. Members may number as high as 400 from the larger *escolas* with full performance groups numbering into the thousands. Bateria rhythms move in duple meter and consist of only percussion instruments.

In the early 20th century, the first samba percussion instruments were made to imitate West African drums. In the 1930s, barrels came into use for the *surdo* (bass drum) and greatly improved the sound. Added over the following decades were the *pandeiro* (tambourine with head), *agogo* (double metal bell), *caixa* (snare), *chocalho* and *ganza* (shakers), and *reco reco* (loud metal scraper). Over the 1940s and 1950s, the *tamborim* (small high-pitched drum) was added and nylon heads replaced animal-skins (Howard & Kelley, 2018). General music teachers can be creative in substituting instruments at hand if they are unable to acquire or afford the instruments all at once:



A selection of Brazilian percussion instruments from Left to Right: tamborim, surdo, apito (whistle), pandeiro, caixa (friction drum), reco reco, agogo, repinique (high-pitched drum).

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Batucada Rhythms

Included here are possible rhythms for several of the samba instruments. These are single examples, but there are countless more options for each instrument. These can be simplified for younger players, or even played one instrument at a time. The first set of rhythms is for the surdo, typically grouped in threes: *Surdo de Primeira* (first surdo) is the largest bass drum, responsible for the primary beat (the *second*, stronger beat); *Surdo de segunda* (second surdo) is the response to the primeira acting as a counterpoint, playing a higher pitch (if possible); and the *Surdo de Terceira* (third surdo) that plays in between the primeira and segunda rhythms. Each samba school has its own way of inserting the terceira.

surdo 1

surdo 2

surdo 3

When there is a rest in the surdo rhythms, the fingertips of the nonmallet hand make a muted tap that holds in place, no rebound, on the drum head. It makes a dampened sound, but soft and subtle.

The agogo bell is a multi-toned bell with its ancestry in the double iron bells common in many West African music traditions.

agogo

There are several shaker-type instruments that can play the following rhythm including the *rocar*, *ganza*, and *chocalho*.

The pandeiro is a framed hand-drum ringed with jingles. It is popular throughout Brazil and played in other styles in addition to samba. It can be played at a virtuosic level, and also taken down to a simplified version by taking a simpler rhythm and cutting the time in half. The thumb strikes across the drumhead in a downward motion, the fingertips tap toward the center, and then the heel of the palm hits the head. These strokes all happen with minimal moving of the hand for a light and delicate sound.

pandeiro

T F P F T F P F...

T = thumb F = fingertips P = palm

chord progression introduction → song with all verses → paradinha → bateria groove →
paradinha → chord progression with song refrain → end on a paradinha

Sambalelê



Brazilian Portuguese +

Verse 1

Sambalelê tá doente
Tá com a cabeça quebrada
Sambalelê precisava
É de umas boas lambadas

Refrain:

Samba, samba, samba ô lelê
Samba, samba, samba ô lalá
Samba, samba, samba ô lelê
Pisa na barra da saia

Verse 2

Ó, morena bonita
Como é que se namora?
Põe e lencinho no bolso
Deixa a pontinha de fora

Refrain

Verse 3

Ó, morena bonita
Como é que se cozinha?
Põe a panela no fogo
E vai conversar com a vizinha

Phonetic Pronunciation

Sahm-ba-leh-leh tah doh-ein-chee
Tah koh-mah kah-beh-sah kay-brah-dah
Sahm-ba-leh-leh pray-see-zah-vah
Eh joh-mahs boh-ahd lahm-bah-das

. leh-leh
. lah-lah

Pee-zah nah bar-rah dah saee-yah

Oh, moh-reh-nah boh-nee-tah
Koh-moo eh kee see nah-moh-ra
Poh-e len-seen-yoo no bohl-soo
Day-sha pohnchee-na ja foh-rah

Oh, moh-reh-nah boh-nee-tah
Koh-moo-eh kee see koo-zee-nya
Poh-eh pah-neh-lah noh foh-goo
Ee vai kohn-vehr-sahr kwom-ah vee-zee-nya

Refrain

Ó, morena bonita	<i>Oh, moh-reh-nah boh-nee-tah</i>
Onde é que você mora?	<i>Ohn-jay ah kee voh-seh moh-rah</i>
Moro na praia formosa	<i>Moh-roh na prai-ah fohr-moh-za</i>
Digo adeus, vou-me embora	<i>Jee-goh ah-deh-oos voh-mee ehm-boh-rah</i>

*morena refers to brown hair, and darker skin. This is not considered offensive in this context.

+ In Brazilian Portuguese, the letter “r” is always flipped.

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Translation

Verse 1: Sambalele is sick with a headache. He is in need of a good night of lambada (a type of dance).

Refrain: Samba . . . step on the hem of your skirt (from dancing with abandon).

Verse 2: Oh, beautiful morena*, how does one get to date you? How do they date me? Put your handkerchief in your pocket with the tip sticking out.

Verse 3: Oh, beautiful morena, how do you cook? By putting the pot on the fire and talking with my neighbor.

Verse 4: Oh, beautiful morena, where do you live? I live on a beautiful beach. I am leaving. Goodbye!

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Notes

1. Vendors such as www.steveweissmusic.com or www.west-music.com are reliable sources for acquiring percussion instruments.

2. I am a regular visitor to percussionist Michael de Miranda’s YouTube channel. He covers dozens of Afro-Caribbean percussion genres. His videos are thorough and easy to follow. Some of the videos are beginner level, and some are much more advanced. My older students have had great success teaching themselves whole ensemble arrangements from his tutorials.

Reference

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Author Biography

Karen Howard is associate professor of music at the University of St. Thomas. Her research interests include ethnomusicology, global choral traditions, and anti-racist pedagogy.