

Rhythm from the East

Brazil's Xaxado Novo group plays forró with a tinge of Arab- and gypsy-influenced rhythms. Their second album will be out in September.

Isaura Daniel*

São Paulo – They play Brazilian rhythms like *forró*, *xaxado*, *baião*, *xote* with an Eastern flavor. *Xaxado Novo* is a group from Brazil whose music portrays the oriental roots of the rhythms they work with. On stage, they combine Eastern Arab and Brazilian northeastern scales, using instruments like the fiddle, which descends from the Arab rebab, and the *pandeiro*, a tambourine-like percussion instrument whose origins hark back to the riq. “By simply playing a *forró* song, you are making a heavily Arab-influenced sound,” says fiddler and singer Felipe Gomide.

It all started with Gomide, a multi-instrumentalist, professor and researcher. About six years ago he met Arab music teacher Mário Aphonso III and joined a study group on the subject. Later on he joined Aphonso's band, Orkestra Bandida, whose sound markedly Arab leaning. “I already had a desire to form a Brazilian folk group to make Arab-influenced music,” he says.

In 2013, Xaxado Novo came together to play forró, with Bruno Duarte on the davul and the *surdo* drum, Marcus Simon on percussion, Davi Freitas on acoustic guitar, and Gomide. They all sing. The group put out its first album late last year, but it's been performing throughout Brazil – especially the Southeast – since its inception. Research is also part of the band's routine. They have performed and studied musical styles in Istanbul, the Island of Crete and Morocco.

According to Gomide, in addition to the *fiddle* and the *pandeiro*, Xaxado Novo plays another Eastern-derived instrument that's widely used in Northeastern Brazilian music: the *zabumba* drum, which originated from the davul. Gomide explains that oriental rhythms were brought into Brazil's Northeast in many different ways. One such way was via the Muslim slaves who staged



the uprising known as *Revolta dos Malês* in 19th-century Bahia. They also came via Europe, which by then had been influenced by the Arabs who dominated the Iberian Peninsula during the Middle Age.

The Eastern flavor in Xaxado Novo's music stems from the use of the Hijaz scale and Arab-themed lyrics. The sound also comprises Turkish, gypsy and Balkan influences. The title song from group's first album *Sertão Cigano* is one of their most Eastern-like tunes, as are *Sopro*, *Pé de Sete* and *Me Embeleze*. But the group also reworks well-known Brazilian forró songs, including ones by Luiz Gonzaga.

The band's audience is diverse. In June, they played over 20 concerts according to Gomide. Many of shows take place in São Paulo night clubs and in different SESC and SESI units (SESC and SESI are trade and industry business owner-sponsored organizations). Although most their concerts are played in the Southeast, they are branching out more and more into other parts of Brazil, the Northeast included. Xaxado Novo also plans on taking their music overseas, beginning with Western Europe.

On July 8, Felipe Gomide and Bruno Duarte will teach the workshop *O Nordeste e o Oriente* (The Northeast and the East), on the connection between Brazilian and oriental folk music, from 2:30 pm to 5:30 at SESC Consolação, São Paulo. September will see the band release their second album, recorded live at a concert in São Paulo's Ibirapuera Park and featuring Orkestra Bandida. The first album features Orkestra's Mário Aphonso and the musician Gabriel Levy, from the group Mawacca, on the accordion.

Quick facts:

Xaxado Novo

Website: www.xaxadonovo.com.br

Phone: +55 11977951449

Email: xaxadonovo@gmail.com

***Translated by Gabriel Pomerancblum**

<http://www.anba.com.br/>

www.inovsi.com.br

