

Musical Ancestries: Brazil Script

NARR: It was a hot, sticky June afternoon in St. Louis. 12 year-old Amanda was looking forward to meeting her friends at the pool when her cell phone rang.

LAURA: Oi, Amanda! This is Aunt Laura from Brazil.

AMANDA: Hi, Aunt Laura! Wow – I thought you were one of my friends!

LAURA: (Laughing) Well I hope I AM one of your friends! I wanted to call and talk with you about an idea your Mom and I had. She told me you have been doing super-great in school.

AMANDA: Yes, ma'am – I like it a lot and I have really great teachers!

LAURA: Good to hear! As a reward for your hard work, how would you like to come and visit me here in Recife? I have saved up tons of airline miles. I thought I would use them by flying you here, and then take you and your cousin João on a side trip. What do you think?

AMANDA: That sounds *incredible!* I'd LOVE to! YES!! When?

LAURA: His semester ends in late June and he doesn't have to go back until August – so this would be the second week of July. You didn't have anything else planned, did you?

AMANDA: Not at all! I'm so excited! Thanks, Aunt Laura! I'll be seeing you soon!!

LAURA: Sooner than you think! I'm meeting with a corporate client there in St. Louis, so we will fly back to Brazil together! I'll stay in touch. Your Uncle Carlos, João and I cannot wait to see you!

NARR: A few weeks later, they were headed to Recife. On the trip, Aunt Laura, who was fluent in English and worked as a guide for corporate tourists, shared lots of background on Brazil. Amanda had only been 5 the last time she and her Mom had visited, so there was a lot to learn. Aunt Laura was the perfect teacher.

LAURA: I know you're very proud of your Brazilian background, Amanda. Did you know that more than 215 million people live in Brazil?

NARR: It has the 6th largest *population* in the world, and 2nd largest in the Americas! It's also very large in *size* – the 5th largest in the world – about the same size as the United States, not including Alaska & Hawaii. Brazil's Amazon River – one of the two largest rivers in the world – supports the world's largest ecosystem, the rain forest, which is home to thousands of plant and animal species.

LAURA: My home, **Recife**, was founded in 1537, in the early years when the **Portuguese** colonized Brazil. That's how Portuguese became the official language. You would be surprised how many foreigners think we speak Spanish, especially North Americans... and that really annoys some Brazilians!

NARR: Aunt Laura went on to explain that when the Portuguese first arrived in Brazil, the indigenous (or native) people were **Brazilian Indians**. Being hunter-gatherers, they mainly grew **manioc** (or **cassava** – a root vegetable) plus a few other plants, and fished to survive. They lived in primitive villages and moved around to follow food supplies. When the Portuguese tried to use them for labor, they would run away, disappearing into the countryside

When the Portuguese began colonizing Brazil in the 1530s, one of the first items exported was **brazilwood**. (Also known as **Pernambuco**, string players prize it for its strength and flexibility; it's ideal for making bows.)

The Portuguese soon realized they couldn't manage the Indians, so they began bringing in West Africans for slave labor, and sugar cane became the prime export product in the 15- and 16-hundreds. In the 1700s, rich resources of gold and gems were discovered in the interior of Brazil, and by the 18- and early 1900s, it was coffee. Soy and beef are the main exports now.

LAURA: All this trade attracted the attention of many Europeans. Brazil became known for its gold mines and sugar cane plantations along the coast, and many people settled.

NARR: As the years went by, the races intermingled. People of Afro-Brazilian and other mixed ancestries, including European, made up almost half of the Brazilian population by the end of the 1900s. There are also Japanese- and Korean-Brazilians. A good deal of German and Polish influence is in the South, African in the Northeast, and European – including Italian – influence in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

LAURA: All of those different nationalities added to the rich Brazilian culture, and they are probably easiest to see in Brazil's music and dance. We will experience it as we travel. But for now, let's take a nap – it is a 10-hour flight!

NARR: Once Amanda and Aunt Laura arrived and made it through customs, a cheerful João greeted them both with big bear hugs and drove them home. They had a snack while João chattered on about the next day's plans.

JOÃO: Amanda – you are going to love this! There's a big, BIG **futebol** game and we're going tomorrow afternoon. (You call our futebol "soccer".) It's between two huge rivals! After the game, let's get some food and go dancing! You like Samba?

AMANDA: I do, but I'm not very good at it!

JOÃO: You will be by the time you leave!! I'll teach you!

AMANDA: (laughing) OK – That sounds like a challenge! You're on, cousin!

LAURA: (smiling) It sounds like I'm going to have my hands full with the two of you tomorrow. We should probably get some sleep.

AMANDA: You're right, Aunt Laura – good night. Thank you so much for this terrific trip. It's so good to be here with you both. I'm just sorry Uncle Carlos is at sea.

LAURA: Well, that's the shipping business... especially when you live in a seaport as big as Recife. He was so sorry to miss your visit. He loves you very much.

NARR: The next morning, they all had a light breakfast, called **café de manhã** (literally "morning coffee"). Coffee is a very important part of the Brazilian breakfast, but Amanda didn't want a cup of coffee. So her Aunt made her some **pingado** – warm milk with sweetened coffee served in a glass. She loved it. That recipe was going home with her.

They each enjoyed an **empadinha** (a small meat pie) at the futebol game. The crowd was totally into the game, super-noisy – and best of all, their team won!

That evening they enjoyed Brazil's national dish, **feijoada** (literally, "black bean" stew) that contained unused cuts of pork, onion, garlic, and spices. It was served with the traditional side dish of fried collard greens mixed with bacon bits, rice, **farofa** (toasted cassava flour), and a slice of orange.

AMANDA: What a fantastic meal! And now, this dessert – these **brigadeiros** – oh my gosh! Sooo good!

LAURA: They're basically a Brazilian chocolate truffle, covered in chocolate sprinkles. Good, aren't they? Just condensed milk, cocoa powder and butter, then rolled in sprinkles. Simple, but heavenly!

JOÃO: OK, ladies – it's time for Amanda's Samba lesson! Let's go!!

NARR: As they walked to a nearby club that catered to teens, Laura talked about Samba – one of the most popular Afro-Brazilian music & dance styles to come from South America. Fast and happy, Samba's high-energy style is definitely music of the streets. It is widely thought to have originated in the state of **Bahia**, with **Congolese** and **Angolan** roots (the African heritage) heard in the drums and percussion instruments. When slavery was abolished in Brazil in 1888, Samba's main center became Rio de Janeiro.

The first published and broadcast Samba song, *Pelo telephone (On the telephone)*, was written in 1917. Its huge success led to Samba being accepted by all Brazilians. Radio stations helped make its popularity grow, and Samba singers like **Carmen Miranda** became famous worldwide. Samba became linked with the Brazilian national identity – along with **futebol** and **Carnaval**.

LAURA: Samba parades led to Samba schools – neighborhood associations where people gathered to prepare for Carnaval. Other forms of dance music also contributed to Samba. Here we are at the club! Let's get a seat.

JOÃO: Don't get too comfortable, Amanda, we're going to dance. Do you know the basic steps?

AMANDA: Well, yes, but I can't do them very fast yet.

JOÃO: Then let's practice them off to the side, over here. We'll try doing it at half the speed of the music, so you can really get the *feel* of the movements. Once your body knows the patterns, we'll speed it up.

NARR: They practiced for quite a while, with João being the perfect host and teacher. Aunt Laura watched them, giggling with them when Amanda got tangled up. She finally got brave enough to try it up to speed, but became self-conscious and stopped, deciding to try again next time. They came back to the table, laughing and animated.

JOÃO: Were you watching, Mom? She did really well!!

LAURA: Yes you did, Amanda. João's right – I bet you will get up to speed next time. You will be Samba-ing off the plane when you get home!

AMANDA: (laughing) I'll probably be practicing in my sleep tonight!

LAURA: That's the best way to learn it – that way you're not thinking so hard and your body just goes with the flow.

NARR: The next day, they went sight-seeing in the historic part of town, **Recife Antigo**, near the docks and waterfront. There's been a lot of restoration done, and there are many places to eat and to experience the culture. They came upon people playing and dancing **Lundu**, another form of Brazilian music.

Based in traditional West African music, simple, repetitive chords are strummed over a syncopated rhythm. The dance is for a couple and is quite flirtatious. It's accompanied by a guitar, or sometimes a thumb piano or drums. With **Choro** as a predecessor, the **Lundu** (in a sense) fathered the **Samba**.

LAURA: It is really good that you are seeing this Lundu, Amanda, because it is Brazil's first national dance. Also, I would love for you to experience **Capoeira**.

NARR: The **Capoeira** is unique because it is actually a **Brazilian martial art** that combines dance, acrobatics, and music. It's accompanied by African instruments, the **berimbau** – a curved bow with a gourd resonator – and the **atabaque** drum.

Created by enslaved Africans in Brazil in the 1700s, Capoeira was developed further by their descendants. Known for its acrobatic and complex maneuvers, it often involves hands on the ground and inverted kicks, but it keeps the artfulness of dance throughout. (One might almost wonder if Capoeira was the inspiration for break dancing!)

LAURA: It is great that we are learning about these traditional music forms, because tomorrow we are going to Rio. That is the birthplace of Choro, which gave rise to the Samba and **Bossa Nova**.

NARR: The flight time from Recife to **Rio de Janeiro** is about 2 hours and 20 minutes. By air, it's 1165 miles, but if you were to drive through the mountains, it would be significantly more. Laura was glad that she'd earned her all those bonus miles as a tour guide!

Once they arrived in Rio, they *had* to see the iconic statue of Christ that overlooks the harbor... **Cristo Redentor**, or **Christ the Redeemer**. It's as much of a symbol for Rio as the Statue of Liberty is for New York... or the Arch for St. Louis.

LAURA: Amanda, because I know that both you and João love music, I got tickets for a Choro concert tonight. We should talk about it before we go. **Choro** is wonderful instrumental music that puts you in another frame of mind. Lovely to listen to, it is played by a small group that usually has a **7-string guitar**, a smaller **Cavaquinho** guitar with 4 strings (about the size of a Ukulele), plus a solo instrument (like a clarinet), and an accordion. The only percussion instrument is a **Pandeiro**.

NARR: Resembling a tambourine, a **Pandeiro** is a percussion instrument in the Frame Drum class. Its head has adjustable tension and it's usually 8-12 inches in diameter. It also has fewer jingles than a tambourine, making it more subdued and subtle. That's perfect for the intimate nature of Choro, which is really a conversation between the instruments. The Pandeiro is used in Choro, Samba, and Capoeira style.

The concert that evening was sensational. They came back to their hotel raving about the exquisite musicianship of the performers.

AMANDA: Aunt Laura, I always knew that I liked Brazilian music – maybe more than any other kind. But NOW I'm beginning to understand what makes it so special. Also, I didn't realize there were so many different KINDS of Brazilian music. This is really fascinating!

JOÃO: Well if you liked THAT, just wait till you hear what her plans are for tomorrow!

LAURA: João! That was supposed to be a surprise!

JOÃO: What?! I didn't tell her *WHAT* the surprise is!!

AMANDA: Well, you might as well tell me now, João, 'cause I'll bug you 'til you do!

LAURA: OK – tomorrow – right here in Rio de Janeiro where it all began – we're going to a Bossa Nova concert with special tributes to **Antonio Carlos Jobim** AND **João Gilberto**!

AMANDA: NO WAY!! *Really?!?* Oh, Mom's gonna' be so jealous she won't let me back in the house!

JOÃO: That's OK. You can just stay here and live with us! You're fun to have around!

LAURA: Yes, you are!

NARR: The tribute concert was beyond belief, and all Amanda's favorite Jobim and Gilberto charts were on the program. All three of them were blown away.

The next morning, it was off to **São Paulo**, to sightsee and then catch a performance of the São Paulo Municipal Symphonic Orchestra at the Municipal Theatre. This gorgeous building is one of the chief landmarks of the city. Not only is it an architectural treasure, it is historically important. In 1922, it was the venue for the **Week of Modern Art**, which is what revolutionized the arts in Brazil. Among other great works they heard that night, there was ***The Little Train of the Caipira*** by the Brazilian composer **Heitor Villa-Lobos**. It depicts a train ride on a narrow gauge track through Brazil's steep mountains! Perfect!

The next day they returned to Recife.

JOÃO: OK, Amanda. Now that we're back home, it's time for "up-to-tempo" Samba tonight!

AMANDA: Are you ready, João? I've been practicing! And – I also learned something else in Rio – Samba bands are a HUGE part of Brazil's **Carnaval** every year, the weekend before Lent starts – usually early Spring! They even have a **Rio Samba Parade** ... plus a championship every year, and the top twelve **Samba Schools** compete for a title! I'm not ready for competition yet, but I do think I can dance with you tonight and not get all messed up!

JOÃO: Cool! You're on!

LAURA: Oh, I'm looking forward to seeing this!!

You know, now that you mentioned **Carnaval**, there's one other form of dance you should know about. It's tied to the **Festa Junina** (the June Harvest Festival) here in the Northeast. Forró mixed the concept of the quadrilha (square dances) and the Lundu. It ended up as **Forró Music and Dance**. The steps are similar to Lundu, but the tempos are much brighter – like a celebration! It can be danced as a couple or in a group line. The backup music is **accordion** and **zabumba** (that's a bass drum), and a **metal triangle**. Simple...and fun!

NARR: That evening, they all went out for a fabulous supper and then returned to the same club they'd visited a few days before. This time, Amanda was ready! She had all the Samba moves down, and she and João had a marvelous time dancing – for a whole hour!

LAURA: I'm worn out just watching the two of you! You were looking good, Amanda!

AMANDA: NEVER underestimate the power of earbuds and a cell phone!

(all 3 laugh)

JOÃO: Congrats, Amanda! You really got it! Great job!

AMANDA: Well, if you hadn't pushed me, I probably couldn't have done it! Thanks!

And thank you again, Aunt Laura, for this fantastic week with you both. I love Brazil and I appreciate my heritage sooo much more now. When you come to visit us in St. Louis, I hope we can have just as much fun. Thank you!

JOÃO: It's been a blast! I can't wait to come visit you!

LAURA: It's been our pleasure, Amanda – you're welcome to come back anytime you want. And I DO expect you to Samba off that airplane when you get home tomorrow!