



Tropicália
Directed by Marcelo Machado

"It's hard to find the right word...to describe it. It's indescribable. It's like trying to describe molecules. Why doesn't my arm dissolve itself, or disappear? Who ties it all together? I'm a walking miracle. We are. How can these molecules and atoms stick here together? Why don't they dissolve and fly off? What's the glue that holds them together? What glue connected all those people?" - Sérgio Dias Baptista of the 'Mutantes'

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TROPICÁLIA

Long before the so-called global village came into existence, and the Internet made it easy to spread your name around the world, Brazil was already global. It is a country which is *culturally cannibalistic* by nature, in which the new and the old, the foreign and the indigenous, not only lie side by side but are mixed, assimilated and recreated day in day out. What sort of country is it, in which, at the height of the 60's, a *capoeira* song, played with the aggressive drive of rock'n'roll, found its way into thousands of homes, entitled 'Sunday in the Park'? What do you call this huge melting-pot? *Tropicalism!*

And, what exactly is *Tropicalism*? It is this simple, yet complex, question that a Portuguese TV host puts to an exiled and downbeat Caetano Veloso right at the start of Marcelo Machado's film. The director, who grew up listening to the ground-breaking sounds of Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil, the Mutantes and Tom Zé, and who did not understand lyrics in English, though had a passion for something called *rock'n'roll*, takes the audience on a tour through sounds and images and into the history of one of Brazil's most iconic cultural movements.

In an affectionate panorama, built up from a miscellany of references, interviews, material dug from archives, images and, of course, songs, the viewer travels through the fertile, controversial and violent years of 1967, 1968, 1969.

Marcelo Machado – Director

"I dived deep down into the period, giving priority, wherever possible, to those who actually photographed, filmed or recorded in 1967, 1968 and 1969. I've always had the impression that documentary making generates more material than is actually used. So I sought out interviews about *Tropicalism* made by other directors, looking for raw material that has never been seen. I put the best of this material together, chronologically, and picked out excerpts which I showed to *tropicalistas* themselves, who were willing to comment. Then I recorded what they had to say. In the spirit of *cultural cannibalism*, I ate it all up and am giving back this collage in which music is the primary interest and songs are the focus of attention. It is a film to sing-along to."

Denise Gomes – Producer

"I am very happy with the way this project has turned out. It was complex, right from the word go. There were big challenges that were overcome, one by one, by a determined and talented team.

The first step was to set up a viable partnership with the television company *Record*, where most of the images necessary for telling the story are kept.

Next came meticulous research into archive material from various sources, in order to build a working script and, at the same time, add in the art direction, which is a part of the narrative progression of the film.

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Towards the end, came complex negotiations for rights from many different artists, in order to bring the images and audio clips, which are such a precious element of the film, out from the archives. These were huge challenges. To build on the success of the project, we arranged partnerships with the acclaimed British production company, 'Revolution Films', and with the American outfit, Mojo, who were on board from the start. We believe that this will boost the film's international profile and, in some way, guarantee that it is launched in major international markets, such as the US and Europe."

Paula Cosenza – Producer

"Only *cultural cannibalism* unites us."

The opening words of Oswald de Andrade's '*Manifesto Antropófago*' could be a summary of how this film was made. It was triggered by the work of other artists, and is now synthesized into a new work of art. There were many difficulties, both practical (the poor condition of the archives and, in fact, the deliberate destruction of historic documentation at the hands of the military regime) and creative (which direction do you set off in when *Tropicália* touches on so many different stories?)

Without doubt, the biggest challenge was putting together a team that would manage to get us around these obstacles, and a group of partners which would enable us to realise our goals.

This is the most collective and collaborative work that I have ever produced. It is a film characterised by narrative and aesthetic choices which are both *bold* and *simple*. And it includes "the millionary contribution of all mistakes" in a moving end-product. "Long live the young ones!"

Di Moretti – Script-writer

Why not?

A strong tremor was felt in Brazil between the years 1967 and 1968... A huge seismic shock challenged, once and for all, preconceived notions about music, culture and Brazilian life. The country had already been shaken up, in cinema, by the *Cinema Novo*; in theatre, by the *Teatro da Oficina*; in poetry, by the Campos brothers; by Hélio Oiticica's anti-art *parangolés*, by the pan-Americans... In the end, **Tropicália** meant Brazil would never be the same again...

And thank goodness for that!

Original concept

Vaughn Glover Quote

"This project began out of and still represents a deep passion for music and its potential as a force for change. As a record collector I have learned much more about Brazil's rich and complex history from music than I have from any books. As I learned about Tropicalia's emergence and eventual suppression I realized that a film chronicling its unique role in global culture could help complete our understanding of Brazil as it became an important force in global affairs. I hope Tropicalia is as important a window in to Brazil for you as it has been for me."

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Maurice James

“The Tropicalia movement, with its rebellious artistic spirit and cultural impact both in Brazil and around the globe has fascinated me since the moment I came across this inspiring and storied subject. The inception of the project came while researching film topics for my master thesis project at USC film school. To now see it come to life up on the big screen is a true joy and to have had the opportunity to realize this project alongside iconic international filmmaker, Executive Producer Fernando Meirelles, director Marcelo Mechado and all of the *Tropicalia* production partners could not have been more ideal. The fact that Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso and the other multitalented Tropicalistas' work have had such an impact on current world renowned songwriting and recording artists as Beck, David Byrne and many others, these many decades later, is a tribute to the timeless resonance of this groundbreaking music and cultural movement.”

TROPICÁLIA BY Zuza Homem de Mello

When they set off for New York in November of 1962, only weeks after the legendary nightclub show “*O Encontro*” at the *Bon Gourmet* in Rio de Janeiro, João Gilberto and Tom Jobim could not have imagined that they would never again play on the same stage. It would have seemed even more improbable that *Bossa Nova* itself was on the wane - never to be what it had been, in Brazil, for the previous four years.

In contrast, when Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso left the country, exiled in 1969, not only did they know that they were their original cellular material for a new revolution in Brazilian music, but they were also fully aware that *Tropicalism* would no longer exist as a movement.

Maybe this observation, picked out from answers given by a slightly dazed Caetano Veloso in Portugal, on comedian Raul Solnado’s TV show *Zip Zap*, and featured right at the start of the documentary **Tropicália**, shows the level of understanding that he and Gilberto Gil – ahead of anyone else, it’s worth emphasizing - had of the chain of events they had started, and left behind in the distressing time they had been through.

Without much to aim for, the two of them passed through Lisbon then settled in the rule-breaking capital of the world back in 1969: London, of course. London had the DNA to be the interim local headquarters for all that was most rebellious in Brazilian music. It would not survive as a movement. But nor would it go away.

This is what unfurls in the illuminating documentary **Tropicália**. The film unravels the unquestionable truth that, through popular music, *Tropicalism* made an impact on a wide range of Brazilian art-forms. The direct presence of work by innovator Glauber Rocha, and by the anarchic Hélio Oiticica and the provocative Zé Celso, prove the point. The interferences of these geniuses of cinema, fine art and theatre put *Tropicália* in its context as an identifiable form of popular musical expression which, like *Bossa Nova* before it, deserves to be included, defined and set down in the Portuguese dictionary. Over these, the bravest Brazilian

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intellectual spirits of that era - among whom should be included the lucid Augusto de Campos and the restless conductors Rogerio Duprat and Julio Medaglia – hovers the work of their precursor, Oswald de Andrade.

Caetano and Gil were lucky enough to be able to take in the intelligent thinking of both those who were drawn to them and those they themselves sought out. They were wise enough to open up their uncommon musical talents in order to make sense out of, and absorb, that which enriched perception of things beyond the realm of mere songs. That is, they sought out that which contained the antithesis of the deep-rooted ideologies permeating the troubled political life of Brazil after the military coup of 1964.

In the eloquent voice of radical graphic artist Rogério Duarte - a convinced and convincing defender of mass culture, and a formative influence on Caetano Veloso - there lies the most assertive example of the contradictory understanding of the entrails of *Tropicalism*.

It was a behavioural aesthetic, reflected in a mirror which fascinated Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil: the image of the younger generation which haunted the world in the 1960's.

As far as the left-wingers and xenophobes Brazil under the military regime were concerned, the bringing together of elements of national folk music and the stridency of the electric guitar - the symbol of rock music – was a jarring sacrilege. At the other extreme, fans of the music being hard-sold to Brazil by the Americans, found it all way off their still quite conservative radars.

In the eyes of Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso, the sound of *pop* could spread beyond popular music, into a much larger universe than that of *Bossa Nova's* intellectualism. What they made was destined for the masses, and stuffed full of strange elements alien to popular music, though perfectly in tune with the broadening of horizons. The anarchy of the play 'The Candle King', the kitsch style of the lyrical, populist, veteran singer Vicente Celestino, and the absurd extravagancies of the Chacrinha programme on television, all came in through the front door of their project. They flatly refused to be selective, never mind what it was that came, or where it was from. They had not the slightest fear of anything that interfered with their openly iconoclastic stance. It was the most expressive form of cultural cannibalism since Oswald de Andrade's manifesto against eloquence and false reverence for the arts. The undefined Universal Sound of the *III Festival da Record* in 1967 finally had a name: *Tropicália*.

"*Alegria, Alegria*" might have launched Caetano Veloso as a pop star, but many believe it was Gilberto Gil who deserved to win with "*Domingo no Parque*". The triumphs they both went on to have, happened in a spiral which seemed it would be endless, and culminating in a manifesto every bit as relevant as that of Oswald de Andrade some decades earlier. You could listen to the manifesto of 1968. It was the album "*Tropicália ou Panis et circenses*". It rang out with a force equal to that of the man who had inspired this new movement in popular music. The spiral rose to a dizzying height in the first months of that year.

The appetites of those who followed Geraldo Vandré were satisfied by finger-pointing songs. The songs of the *tropicalistas* just left everyone in a spin, and astonished the extremists. The

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booing which greeted the innocent-sounding songs at the 1967 Festival in the TV Record Theatre were followed up aggressive scenes at the preliminary round of the 1968 International Song Festival (the FIC), held at the Tuca Theatre in São Paulo. On this night in '68 the sea of rose petals became a tidal wave. Caetano Veloso exploded. Unlike Sergio Ricardo the year before, he didn't smash his guitar to bits. Caetano gave back thrown tomatoes, balls of paper and bits of wood from the stage with words that wouldn't injure anyone but which had a much deeper power - the power of an oration. That was how the long-established way in which the general public was used to taking part in the festivals was fractured. Until this point, the audience would include itself, like a personality, in the song festivals. In the second half of 1968 it was clear that boing would not do. What followed was a rapid downpour of happenings and about-turns. And, in less than three months, it was to end in a prison cell.

Wisely, the documentary **Tropicália** takes the same unrestrictive posture. It makes use of ingenious graphic techniques to create scenes from excerpts of live shows and television programmes, from home movies and news footage, from collages and flashes. Edited with considered, sudden cuts then overlaid with the soundtrack and voice-overs these scenes speak and suggest. Sometimes with great vehemence and sometimes with sweet tenderness, the film unmaskes the way that it was possible for a new-born sound, the songs of the *tropicalistas*, to be both warmly embraced and cruelly persecuted, all in a space of less than a year. The year of 1968.

Tropicalism defies all forms of definition as a style or a rhythm. The era of *Bossa Nova* remained trapped within formalities. In contrast, and as illustrated by the juxtaposed scenes of the documentary **Tropicália**, *Tropicalism* not only used musical elements from overseas but also openly accepted deeply popular outlooks, which were stiffly looked down upon by those who believed themselves to be guardians of the truth.

Tropicalism offered to rejuvenate the pop song post-*Bossa Nova*, through what was almost a war against a form regarded as sacred by the musical elite. And, by putting the symbolic electric guitar side by side with the *berimbáu*, it confused the military dictatorship that was running Brazil.

In **Tropicália** the astonishing symbiosis of Rogerio Duprat and the trio of Rita/Serginho/Arnaldo who made up the Mutantes, the conflicts and demonstrations for freedom, the pig-headed censorship, the hateful house-arrests, the deplorable prisons, the objectivity of the creative businessman Guilherme Araujo, the provocative irreverence of Tom Zé, the enchanting clarity of Nara Leão, o evocative non-conformity of Torquato Neto and the sweet explosion of Gal Costa's voice, intertwine in a sequences of scenes interspersed with cinematic graphics set up as if in a third dimension.

Tropicália is a film as disconcerting as the subject it depicts. Who knows, perhaps it goes so far as *not to* qualify as a documentary at all. It is a cinematic narrative about a historic era that Brazil lived through, in which the country's songs went global, but were still the least noticed and most threatening weapon against those in power. And this was during a military

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dictatorship that had burst over the country during a *coup d'état* which was, incredibly, then known as the *Revolution of '64*. In the end, **Tropicália** is filled with a lyricism reminiscent of a love film. And with a longing.

Credits ♦ *Tropicália*, 87 minutes

Director

Marcelo Machado

Producers

Denise Gomes

Paula Cosenza

Executive Producers

Fernando Meirelles

Maurice James

Andrew Eaton

Oliver Kwon

Michael Blaha

Associated Producers

Josh Hyams

Lincoln Phipps

Trevor Sagan

Production Director

Ariene Ferreira

Screenplay

Di Moretti, a.c.

Macelo Machado

Original Story

Vaughn Glover

Maurice James

Photo

Eduardo Piagge

Editor

Oswaldo Santana

Art Director

Ricardo Fernandes

Animation

Gabriel Bitar

Music

Alexandre Kassin

Sound Editor

François Wolf

Research Coordinator

Eloá Chouzal

Research

Antônio Venâncio

CONTACTS:

Paula Cosenza

Cel: + 55 11 8171 3669

Phone: +55 11 3811 2000

E-mail: pcosenza@bossanovafilms.com.br

Luli Liebert

Cel: + 55 119111 9692

Phone: +55 11 3811-2000

E-mail: luli@bossanovafilms.com.br

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