

Musicians, musicologists and people who love our music may disagree on one thing or another. After all, as our fat and funny neighbor, a character created by Nelson Rodrigues, would say, we can't argue over tastes. However, if there is a name above individual preferences, this name is Pixinguinha's. The critic and historian Ary Vasconcelos summarized the importance of this fantastic instrumentalist, composer, arranger and conductor in an admirable way: "If you have 15 volumes to speak about all Brazilian music, be sure it won't be enough. However if you have a space enough for only one word, it is not all lost; write quickly: Pixinguinha."

A quick passage through the life and work would be enough to verify that he is responsible for outstanding deeds, such as start recording his own music at the age of 13, revolutionizing the *choro* performance. It is back then (1911) that recording was at its beginnings in Brazil e the instrumentalists, even the experts in *choro*, seemed intimidated by the novelty and played very carefully afraid of making a mistake. Pixinguinha was very self-assured at the very beginning and improvised some flute notes with the same ability as he played in the circles of *choro* together with his father and brothers, also musicians, and with many other instrumentalists who composed the musical elite of the early XX century.

Pixinguinha was not efficient in some aspects of daily life. In 1968, for instance, The Popular Brazilian Music (MPB), journalists, friends and the current Government got together to celebrate Pixinguinha's 70th birthday in a series of events on April 23. Knowing that the most used birth certificate in the late XIX century was the Baptismal Certificate, the musician and researcher Jacob Bitencourt, the great Jacob do Bandolim, went to the Santana church, downtown Rio de Janeiro, to get a copy of the Pixinguinha's certificate and found out that he was not going to turn 70 but 71, because he was not born in 1898 as he always told people, but in 1897.

The mistake was consecrated 'officially' in 1933, when Pixinguinha went to the register office to have his first birth certificate issued. He was not only mistake about the year of birth. He gave the same name as his father's Alfredo da Rocha Viana, but forgot to add the Filho, which was his last name; and he also gave his mother's full name incorrectly: Raimunda Rocha Viana instead of Raimunda Maria da Conceição. The only correct information is that he had a lot of brothers and sisters: Oldemar and Alice from his mother's first marriage, and Otávio, Henrique, Léo, Cristodolina, Hemengarda, Jandira, Hermínia and Edith, from his mother's marriage with Alfredo Viana. Pixinguinha was the youngest.

The flute and the circles of choro did not prevent him to have a childhood like the other children; he played marbles and flew kites in the first districts where he lived, Piedade and Catumbi. His father, also a flutist, not only gave him his first flute but also sent him to the best music teachers, amongst whom there was the great musician and composer Irineu de Almeida, nicknamed Irineu Batina. His first instrument was the small guitar, but he soon changed to the flute. His first composition, he was still very young – was Lata de Leite, a *choro* in three parts as it was almost obligatory at the time. In 1911, he joined the Carnival rancho orchestra – Filhas da Jardineira, where he met his lifetime friends, Donga and João da Baiana.

His father was also worried about Pixinguinha's studies, so before going to a regular school he had private tuition. He, however, really wanted to play music. Pixinguinha was enrolled in a famous and strict school, Colégio de São Bento, and even though all the strictness, he succeeded in missing classes to play in a bar called A Concha, in Lapa which ended up being his first job. "Sometimes I went there wearing the school uniform", he mentioned in his speech at the Museum of Image and Sound. All that happened before he was 15, when he also worked as a musician in the orchestra of the Teatro

Rio Branco. In 1914, at the age of 17, he edited for the first time a composition called *Dominante*. In the edition of the Casa Editora Carlos Wehrs, his nickname was not yet registered as Pinzindim. In fact, his nickname did not have a definite spelling, because it was given by his African grandmother. The meaning of Pinzindim had many versions. To the radio announcer and researcher Almirante, it meant 'good boy' in an African dialect, but the best interpretation, without a doubt, was given by the researcher of African culture and great composer Nei Lopes, who found the word 'psi-di' in a language from Mozambique, which meant glutton. As Pixinguinha already had the family nickname **roast beef**, because he was seen getting a piece of meat without permission before the lunch Nei Lopes is the best.

In 1917, he recorded with a group called Grupo do Pechinguinha [sic] at Odeon including two classics from his work, the choro *Sofres porque queres*, and the waltz *Rosa*, this last one became more famous in 1937 when Orlando Silva recorded it. At that time, he was already a famous character not only because of his talent as a composer and flutist but also because of other enterprises, among them his participation in the Grupo do Caxangá, which had paraded at Carnival since 1914 and was formed by important musicians such as João Pernambuco, Donga and Jaime Ovale. He was an important element in the circles of choro at the famous house Tia Ciata (Hilária Batista de Almeida), where they played choro in the lounge and samba in the yard. The famous *Pelo Telefone*, by Donga and Mauro de Almeida, was composed there and is considered the first recorded samba. In 1918, Pixinguinha and Donga were invited by Isaac Frankel, owner of the elegant cinema Paris, on Rio Branco Avenue, to form the small orchestra that would play in the waiting room. Then the group Oito Batutas was born. His members were Pixinguinha (flute), Donga (guitar), China, Pixinguinha's brother (guitar and vocal), Néelson Alves (small guitar), Raul Palmieri (guitar), Jacob

Palmieri (mandola and reco-reco) and José Alves de Lima, Zezé (mandolin and ganzá). "The only orchestra that touches the Brazilian heart", read the signboard at the entrance of the movie theater. It was a great success, despite some restrictions due to racism by the press. In 1919, Pixinguinha recorded *Um a zero*, which he composed to honor the victory of the Brazilian team over the Uruguayan, giving Brazil its first international title, South American Champion. It is impressive how modern this choro is, even when compared to so many works made more than half a century later.

The *Oito Batutas* traveled all around Brazil and, by the end of 1921, they received an irresistible invitation: a musical tour in Paris, sponsored by the millionaire Arnaldo Guinle. And, on January 22, 1922, they embarked to France, where they stayed until August and played in different houses, being the biggest part of the time in the posh cabaret Scheherazade. It was in Paris that Pixinguinha got the saxophone from Arnaldo Guinle, and it would substitute the flute at the beginning of the 1940s, and Donga got the banjo with which he would record a lot of songs. Back from France, the group made a lot of performances in Rio de Janeiro (the celebration of the centennial anniversary of the Independence included) and, in November 1922, again the *Oito Batutas* traveled, this time, to Argentina, going around the country during about five months and recording many songs to Victor recording company. Back to Brazil, the name Pixinguinha had already gotten his definite spelling in the records and the press. New performances in theaters and in various events and many recordings, with his group identified by the names of *Pixinguinha and Conjunto*, *Orquestra Típica Pixinguinha*, *Orquestra Típica Pixinguinha-Donga* and *Orquestra Típica Oito Batutas*.

The arrangements written to his bands drew the attention of the recording companies which were under the traditionalism of the conductors of that time, almost all of them were foreigners and

unable to write arrangements with the *bossa* required by the samba and the Carnival music. Hired by Victor, Pixinguinha made a big revolution, filling our music with its Brazilian soul which had long been missed. Pixinguinha made a countless number of arrangements during the years when he was the arranger of the recording companies. All this information makes us believe that it is not an exaggerated commentary who affirms that Pixinguinha was the greatest creator of the Brazilian musical arrangement. In the 1930's, he recorded many songs as an instrumentalist and many others he himself made (among them are the greatest recordings of Orlando Silva of *Rosa* and *Carinhoso*.), but the most expressive of his phases (including more than half of the 1940's) was his arranger's abilities.

In 1942, his last recording as a flutist was in a record containing two *choros* composed by him: *Chorei* and *Cinco Companheiros*. He never explained why he changed the flute for the saxophone, although some believe that the intake of alcohol was the reason behind the change. The Brazilian music was enriched by the counterpoints Pixinguinha used to make in the Saxophone and with the launching of dozens of records together with the flutist Benedito Lacerda, certainly one of the highest moments in the life of choro regarding its recording history. By the end of 1945, Pixinguinha took part in the opening of the program "*O pessoal da Velha Guarda*", directed and hosted by the radio announcer Almirante and in which Benedito Lacerda also participated. In 1950, Pixinguinha had an original initiative: he recorded a *lundu* composed by him (words by Gastão Viana) *Yaô Africano* which was recorded in 1938. In 1961, the Mayor of Rio de Janeiro, João Carlos Vital, appointed Pixinguinha as music teacher and voice instructor (he had worked for the City Hall since 1938.). Up until he retired he taught in many carioca schools. From 1953 on, he started to Bar Gouvea, downtown Rio de Janeiro, so often did he go there that it was only interrupted due to health

problems. In the end he was given a permanent chair with his name carved in it, and no one could ever sit on it.

The Festival da Velha Guarda was a big success. It celebrated the fourth centenary of the city of São Paulo in 1954. Pixinguinha gathered his friends from Velha Guarda (once again under the control of Almirante) and performed many times on the radio, on TV and in some squares with an audience of dozens of million paulistas. Before coming back to Rio, Almirante got a letter from the president of the Sindicato dos Jornalistas (The Journalists' Union) of São Paulo, saying, among other things, that "among all the extraordinary festivals in which we celebrate the fourth centenary, no other has had the same repercussion in São Paulo, nor any has succeeded in touching more deeply the heart of the people.". In 1955, the second *Festival da Velha Guarda* happened but not with the same enthusiasm and repercussion as the first.

The most important event in Pixinguinha's life in 1955 was the recording of his first *long-play* together with his musicians and Almirante. The name of the record was *Velha Guarda*. In that same year the entire group took part in a show called *O samba nasce no coração* at the posh nightclub Casablanca. In the following year, the street where he lived, in the district Ramos, due to a project by the congressman Odilon Braga, sanctioned by the Mayor Negrão de Lima. At the opening, the mayor and many other musicians were present and it was celebrated with a big party that lasted a whole day and night with music and a lot of alcoholic drinks. In November 1957, he was one of the guests of President Juscelino Kubitschek to have lunch with the great trumpet player Louis Armstrong at the Palácio do Catete. In 1958, after having lunch at the club Marimbás he felt unwell. In this same year, his band Velha Guarda was chosen by the powerful magazine *O Cruzeiro* to welcome the Brazilian soccer players who won Sweden's World Cup. In 1961, he composed many songs

with Vinícius de Moraes for the movie *Sol sobre a lama*, of Alex Vianny. In June 1963, he had a heart attack which made him stay in hospital several weeks.

In 1968, the celebration of his 70th birthday was a concert in the *Teatro Municipal* and this concert became a record, an exhibition in the *Museu da Imagem e do Som*, a solemn session in Rio's *Assembléia Legislativa* and lunch that gathered hundreds of people in a *churrascaria* (a place where the main dish is barbecue) in the district of Tijuca. In 1971, Hermínio Belo de Carvalho produced a record, named *Som Pixinguinha* with an orchestra and flute solos by Altamiro Castilho. In 1971, in one of those moments that took his friends to consider him a saint: his wife, Dona Beti, didn't feel well and was taken to hospital. Days later he had another heart attack and was sent to the same hospital his wife was, but, so, for her not to know he was also sick, he would put on his suit and visit her as if he had come from home. For this and many other reasons, Vinícius de Moraes used to say that if he weren't Vinícius, he would like to be Pixinguinha. Dona Beti passed away on June 7, 1972, at the age of 74.

On February 17, 1973, when he was getting ready to go to the church Nossa Senhora da Paz to be the god-father of a friend's child, he had his last heart attack. The Banda de Ipanema, which was having its Carnival parade, could no longer be happy and immediately dissipated at the hearing of the news of his death. No one was in the mood for Carnival.