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REVIEW

SEEGER, ANTHONY.
POR QUE CANTAM OS KISÊDJÊ – UMA ANTROPOLOGIA MUSICAL DE UM POVO AMAZÔNICO.

Original title: *Why Suyá Sing: A Musical Anthropology of An Amazonian People*. Translation: Guilherme Werlang. São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2015, 320 p.

Why Suyá Sing – A musical Anthropology of an Amazonian People (2004) is a book about the singing in a South-American indigenous community. Written by Anthony Seeger and published originally in 1987, the work is a study of music and its role in the social process. Furthermore, the book brings a DVD with original audios and two films. The audios integrated the first and second editions, and the first film was made in 1996 – this one directed by Seeger himself -, and the second was made more recently, directed by *kisêdjê* filmmakers. Some reflections wonder through the text – why do members of a certain group present singing in certain structures, timbres and styles? Why do certain members of the community sing specific things, in specific ways, to a certain audience in a specific place and moment? In this way, Seeger's ethnography presents these questions throughout a musical anthropology. Seeger proposes to make a musical anthropology, differently of anthropology of the music, which would not only bring to the study of music concepts and questions of anthropology, but would seek to apprehend structures and social processes of transformations in human groups.

The study takes as reference the community of *kisêdjê*, speakers of the language *jê*, in the state of Mato Grosso.

Fundamental aspects of *kisêdjê*'s social life is constructed based in ceremonies and musical performances, and they usually define themselves as a group based in certain genres of singing and body ornaments, which associate with the production and attention to the sounds. Thus, the book shows the creation, the reestablishment, the maintenance and the alteration of the structures and processes centered in the performance in the life of the *kisêdjê*.

Seeger argues that music is much more than sounds captured by the recorder – it is an intention to do something called music. People don't usually write about why members of a group do the music they do, because there is polemics concerning the kind of answer that could sustain this question. The answers that are given in this book are not final causes – the reason we sing is not known, even though all societies produce structured sounds. Seeger does not analyze the musical products of the *kisêdjê*, nor does he seek biological or material causes, but he brings his answers to the processes and social values of the *kisêdjê*.

The book addresses the performance of a ceremony, in which Seeger participated and researched in 1972, to present its music and its performative context: A Festa do Rato (The Rat's Party). The ceremony was realized once more in 1976, and Seeger found recordings of the performance in 1963. The author argues that these three performances have a particular richness that raises broad questions.

In the first chapter, Seeger describes the first day of the Festa do Rato, in 1972. He describes aspects of the musical performance and social life of the *kisêdjê*, placing the ethnographer and the reader in the unfolding of the event.

The Festa do Rato is a rite of passage, in which a boy starts his initiation in the male activities at the village's patio. It is one of the initiation rituals that permeate the life of a *kisêdjê* man. In the Festa do Rato, what stands out is the relationship among an adult man and child to which he transmitted his own names. Each performance reestablishes certain relations between human beings and animals, village and neighborhood, and between the *kisêdjê* and the cosmos in which they live and have created. The Festa do Rato is initiated in January 24th, and it ends in February 7th, in 1972. It is a period of two weeks of intense ritual activity, along with periods of singing, dance, and extensive activities.

There is an evident beginning to the ceremony and a long phase that follows it, in which slow preparations for the final night happen. In the final night, there is singing, and the ritual objects and the social relations that were learned and reactivated in the weeks that passed are seen. Throughout the Festa do Rato, the *kisêdjê* perform styles of chant and forms of discourse. These happen also in many other ceremonies.

These discourses and chants are fundamental and responsible for the efficacy of the ceremony.

“My sister, I will sing to my name receptor” – Under the light of the sky in the sunset, Kágrere talks to his sister. (...) A part of Kágrere’s opening chant can be traduced as: “Black rat, let’s go to our name receptor and we jump and sing. I jump and sing in the Rat’s Party. Let’s go to our name receptors, we jump, and sing”. Kágrere sings for almost an hour. Sometimes an old man screams a follow-up in falsetto. The men keep talking; women sit in front of houses, with their small kids. The Rat’s Party has started. (Seeger 2015, 25)

Seeger analyses the social life of the *kisêdjê* as if it were operated in an alternating current – an alternation between ritual and non-ritual periods and between activities, relationships, and feelings concerning each one – that creates the tissue of social life. There is an alternation between two forms of existence. The ritual form brings the collective public activities, as chant and food distribution. It also intensifies relationships between men, their mother, sisters and sons of their sisters. On the other side, the non-ritual mode respects the daily life and individual activities. Music and other forms of discourse constitute ways to understand a period as ceremonial or not. The *kisêdjê* chant is fundamental in the settings of the characteristic relations of all ceremonies. The author argues that even though we do not know much about the musical traditions of the low lands of South America, it seems to him that always that we hear something, something important is happening. Music, to the *kisêdjê*, makes possible communication between human beings and brings a state of euphoria.

A performance of a ceremony as the Festa do Rato shows relationships that seem timeless between men, women, animals, name donors and receptors, expressed through chant, dance, and silence in the ceremony. However, each performance involves specific actors and specific choices related to many decisions.

In the second chapter, Seeger analyses the vocal art of the *kisêdjê*, from the speech to the singing. Almost every music that *kisêdjê* make are singing, therefore the author argues that the analyses should start from the relation between the chant and other artistic vocal forms. In this way, he presents and compares samples of many genres. Seeger compares genres from the lyrics, phrase, relation of pitch and textual authority. Thus, he distinguishes the chant from other verbal forms.

The main genres of *kisêdjê*’s vocal art are: the calling-chant, which are sung individually; the seasonal chants, that can be sung at any moment

in raining season; and the unison chants, specific from the Festa do Rato, which are sung only in the final night of the ceremony. The *kisêdjê* distinguish these genres from the speech (*kapere*), narration (*saren*), chant (*ngere*) and invocation (*sangere*). Even though *ngere* is translated as music, music to the *kisêdjê* is, in this case, exclusively singing.

The linkages between the *kisêdjê* genres show how the separation between speech and music distorts both of them. The narration, the invocations and the chant structure the time, the tone, and the timbre. All of them present a structure of pitch and lyrics. The *kapere* (discourse) is characterized by its text priority over the melody, by the determination of the text and melody by the speaker and by its growing formality in public performances. The *saren* (narrative) and the *sangere* (invocation) prioritize the text the relatively established text over the relatively established melody. And, at last, the chant is characterized by its priority of the melody over the lyrics and for its non-human origin, establishing time, lyrics and melody.

In this way, the chant is distinguished from other artistic vocal forms according to the priority of the melody over the text, the stability of it, the extension of the text repetition, the regularity of its sentences, and the stable relation between pitches and established texts. The chant is realized as different from other vocal forms in style and lyrics. The relation given between texts and structures varies according to each genre, and it is possible to understand this relation when the spectrum of the music and the speech is examined. Seeger argues, then, that there shouldn't be an isolation between academic disciplines, but we should study these forms of discourse as in an interrelation of genres that are based in phonetics, text and time in many ways.

In chapter 3, Seeger addresses the ideas about the origins of the singing and the composition of music. He argues that these aspects are an important indication of what is music and how it is related to other aspects in life. The answer to "Why do they sing?" lays in the comprehension of what is a chant and how it is apprehended. The chants, according to the *kisêdjê*, were introduced in three different ways. Some were considered old, and originate from remote times. Others were original in a specific ceremony and were taught to the *men with no spirits* – that are comparable to what we call composers. Other chants, at last, were acquired through learning with foreigners. In this way, all chants seemed to arise from outside the *kisêdjê* community. However, each introduction of the chant had its specific characteristics.

The origins of chants and ceremonies described in the *kisêdjê* myths are different from many other south-american indigenous groups, in which spirits teach them chants. In the *kisêdjê* myths, certain chants in unison and recitatives were learned with beings that are part human and part animal, in the process of metamorphoses. Among the *kisêdjê*, if there is

a metamorphosis, there is singing. For example, there is the story of a man that was turning into a big deer. He sang a chant that became the particular of the Festa do Veado Campeiro (Party of the Pampas Deer).

The emergence of new chants came from two types of people: the sorcerer or the *person with no spirits*. The *person with no spirit* is someone that possibly annoyed a sorcerer. The sorcerer, then, would take his soul with anger. These *people with no spirit* were men and women in the condition of a suspense metamorphoses. Their body is alive in the village, but their spirit lived with some kind of natural species, learning singing from it. They are liminal figures, which would not be here nor there. (Seeger 1987 apud Turner 1968, 95)

Certain people that had lost their spirits and were respected for their chant knowledge would be master of ceremony *kisêdjê*. The ceremony master would decide when the ceremony is done, and how to perform it correctly. People who had lost their spirits could teach only chants that they could listen. In other words, if the person had been living with birds, he could only teach bird singing. Sometimes, the person's spirit could move through different domains of nature.

The third way of learning chants was through foreigners (enemy indians, pacific Indians, and non-indians). These foreigners would teach a chant or a ceremony to the whole community. The *kisêdjê* learned many foreigner chants. They sang chants from more than ten different groups to which they had contact in the last 200 years. As they appropriated these chants from other groups, they also incorporated something of power and knowledge from these groups.

The meaning of foreigner chants to the *kisêdjê* implies a continuity of this mode of learning music and the others. In the *kisêdjê* oral traditions, they had learned chants from a man that would turn into a deer, another from a man who would turn into a forest pig and, thus, this pattern of learning chants from foreigners has a continuity from the past myth described in the stories told by the ancient.

Therefore, Seeger discusses, in chapter 4, the chant as a part of the *kisêdjê* construction of the world - part of the creation of some processes and social ideas. Music is more than sound and cosmology. Music is, according to the author, any process of musical conception, realization and valuation. Each performance recreates the meaning of singing and people, as well as it expresses the status and feelings of the performers and the community.

Seeger proposes, as an analogy, to think the *kisêdjê* village as a concert hall, its annual cycle as a concert series and its population as an orchestra. So,

he discusses the musical space, time and the social relations in which music production matters. In this way, he describes the musical expression of the individual identity and the choices of a singer during his performance, situating the sounds in a social framework.

As he thinks the village as a concert hall, Seeger analyses the sonic recreation of special relations. The *kisêdjê* village was small and the sounds would traverse easily. The houses were around an open patio, the speakers would surround the patio, the women would mourn the dead in their houses and the old would scream from their nets. The patio was mainly a domain of men and public performances. It represented the vivid contrast with the residential houses, which were mainly a domain of women based in kinship. Around the circle of houses, there was a silence zone, which was known as the *dead side*, in which there would not be singing. The forest was a kingdom of the animals and spirits and contrasted to the patio. The patio was clean, with no bushes, and it is where adult men sang together. The forest is where the animals wandered.

The *kisêdjê* sang in the forest camps, in houses and in the village patio, and they danced, from one to the other domain, in a systematic mode. The sounds and the silence produced in their singing circumscribed the different parts of their cosmos. The special domains were full of meanings and associations through the singing, the dancing and ceremonial activities. Therefore, the singing and the silence were part of a constant recreation of the meaningful space.

As Seeger analyses the year as a concert, he looks into the creation of time throughout the sound. Societies and individuals create time as a relevant social experience, and they act inside of it. The *kisêdjê* looked into the sun, the stars, the moon and the constellations to calculate time. However, their important social events were imposed by the chant. Singing, dancing and other ceremonial activities establish certain spaces and reestablish periods of time. The *kisêdjê* had a social calendar more than an astronomic one. The year was divided into a raining and a dry season. However, the chants didn't necessarily follow the seasons, but they establish changes in the seasons, independent of the raining. They set gradual changes in the day and year with diverse musical events, in different styles. The chant set longer and shorter periods of time.

At last, Seeger proposes an analogy of the society as an orchestra, addressing the vocal recreation in social relations. What and how the *kisêdjê* sang was defined, in a considerable part, by their group filiation – which was based in age, sex and onomastic group. The group filiation would determine who would sing a specific chant in a day, or who would mourn the dead, or cry in falsetto. The *kisêdjê* society was an orchestra of voices, and its character-

istics were limited by gender and age. The performances established and reestablished important relations between groups and individuals.

The body, if thought as an analogy, is a musical instrument. The performer learns the singing, the body movements, and the audience listens to him. The *kisêdjê* most important body ornaments were related to the listening. Therefore, there is an importance given to the ears and the mouth. The only musical instrument that they played regularly is the rattle. In this way, the movement was necessary to play the rattle, and the dance would be an essential part of the musical performance.

In addition, Seeger argues that the concept of what a person is – the constitution of the biological and social individual – can be very important to understand the social processes. The concept of person to the *kisêdjê* concerned three components: the body, the social identity, and the spirit. Every ceremony was a reaffirmation of the social identity of the onomastic groups, as well as the groups based in age and gender. In this way, every ceremony held details that identified groups.

The author emphasizes that conscious agents perform ceremonies and music, and they create something that is new and old, under unique circumstances. The singing was part of the creation of their society and their cosmos. The *kisêdjê* musical performance was a creation of structures that involved sound, place, occasion, person and senses. The chant shared the old structure, even though it was new. Therefore, the creation and recreation of social life were made through the daily life, as it happened in the ritual. The *kisêdjê* were always recreating their society.

In chapter 5, Seeger seeks a relation between these general characteristics discussed before in the chapter and the sounds of music itself. The author analyses one chant of the rainy season and thinks over the slow rise in the tune during the performance of this unison chant. This microtonal rise tune was given as a mystery.

Seeger analyses Marina Roseman's transcription of this chant. Roseman suggests that the spots in which the tuning falls indicate that the ascending tune can be an important characteristic of the *kisêdjê* music. The gradual ascension of the tune is something familiar and was registered in many North-American indigenous groups. The important is that it doesn't exist in any society – some societies tuning drifts upward as well as downward, and some societies make this an intentional aspect of the musical structure. In this way, a more accurate analysis would be necessary to understand why this happens.

Seeger realized that the absolute tonal ascension is usual in all the big ceremonial events. Thus, he selected many chants of the same genre

performed by a group of *kisêdjê* men through the big ceremonial events. The pitch is approximate, but the important data is the measure of the rise. In this way, Seeger realized that a gradual rise was probably existent in all performances. Random tests in other genres revealed a gradual rise in the pitch as well. From this analysis, he could see a very clear pattern of slow rise, generally bigger in the first part.

The *kisêdjê* related the singing of an individual to his throat. All music was singing, thus, the throat – or what would be the voice for us – was the most important instrument. A renowned singer would be described as having a nice throat, as a mediocre singer would be described as having a poor throat. In this way, it would be possible to classify the *kisêdjê* musical genres according to the place in the throat that they were sung. The calling-chant was sung in the *superior extremity of the throat* or with *the small throat*. The unison chant was sung in the *bottom of the throat* of with the *big throat*. However, the *kisêdjê* senses of what made a beautiful chant involved more than the throat; it involved also the singer identity.

Throughout this study, Seeger brings some points to Roseman's transcription and answers some of the questions she poses in the study. Some of his conclusions are: the *kisêdjê* didn't seem to articulate words to the gradual rise in the singing pitch, even though the rise is constant in the chants. It is not clear if the tonal ascension is meaningful, as to say it is conscious. This rise can exist just as a consequence of other values. The participant observation showed that changes in tuning were thought in the performance coordination. It was not clear who would conduct the oscillation in tuning and the role of the performance context in influencing the tonal ascension seemed minor.

Throughout this analysis, Seeger focus on three important questions in ethnomusicology: the usage of our own analytical categories to the musical analysis, the role of musical transcription in ethnomusicology, and the benefits of using many approaches to musical phenomena. He states that it is important to consider native analytical categories, which can help to get to important places. However, if he only used native musical categories, he wouldn't find the issue of the ascending tune, as well as the musical transcription.

Seeger takes back to the Festa do Rato in chapter 6, in which he describes key details of these 14 days:

In almost all afternoons, the boys sang calling-chants in the country and the men sang unison chants in the house-of-men. Before the dawn in January 25th, Kágrere's name receptor's male relatives went out for hunting and fishing expedition to obtain food for the singers. In the 26th, around 7 a.m., a

man went to the house-of-men and started singing in solo calling-chants and kept on going through the day. Many of the men were outside the village, collecting seeds of the Buri-ti leaf (...) to make dance masked, but they got back in time to sing in the afternoon for the closure of the soloist's whole day. In January 27th, a man from the opposite half sat down, with paintings and ornaments, in his sister's bed. When he went off, walking through the village's patio to sing, his sister wept, while she remembered her dead relatives and the ceremonies from the past. He had rattles on his knees, outstanding gourds in his backs, clashing in each step, feathers tied in his arms and in the back of his head, an arc and arrows, he walked slowly around the patio counterclockwise until the men sang an unison chant of the raining season. After this, he came back to his sister's house, took off his ornaments, went to his own house and slept. At night, men sang calling-chants and entertained themselves in lively conversations and calls, in an euphoric joy. (Seeger 1987, 207)

Seeger describes the preparations for the ceremonies that went on in which day, as well as the singing in February 6th, until the closure of the ceremony. Between the opening and the closure of the event, men sang for 14 days. All the ceremonial period, if compared to the village's life, has an increase in activity and an expansion of the conscience among values and structures. The extent of the excitement, the rearrangement of social relations, and the many means of cooperation in the food preparation and the singing reanimated important sectors of the *Kisêdjê* life. Through 14 days of ceremony and approximately 15 hours of singing in the final day and night, the music helped to express and create the euphoria that should characterize the *kisêdjê*'s ceremonies.

In this way, the space, the time, the human relations and many of the musical genres discussed in this study had a role in the final night of the Festa do Rato. An invocation left the rain distant. The men and boys called individually in the houses, in the patio and in the forest sang chants. Unison chants were performed in the houses. The significance of many spaces and transformations at dawn and sunset were evident. At last, the metamorphosis was key to the ceremony.

The *kisêdjê* chant, as Seeger demonstrates in the book, was a key element in the social production and reproduction. It reestablished the clarity of the temporal lengths and of certain human relation forms. Singing made the creation and expression of the aspects of the *self* possible. Thus, it generated the sentiment of euphoria that was specific of the ceremonies, and it related past and present in a transformative way. Seeger concludes

that the *Kisêdjê* sang because singing can reestablish the good and the beauty of the world and how to relate to it.

The *Kisêdjê* sang because, through singing, they could restore certain kinds of order in their world and create new kinds of order too. Singing is an experience of the body and the social person, and it is a way to reproduce society. According to the author, music kept the a close connection to the social identity and to the production of matter. The *Kisêdjê* sang because singing is a form of articulating life experiences to society processes.

The book *Why Suyá sing: a musical anthropology of an Amazonian people* is about the total organization of the *kisêdjê* singing, from its relation to other verbal genres to its association to social reproduction and economic production. The *kisêdjê* society was an orchestra, according to Seeger, and the singing created some kind of settlement, in which sounds revealed what the sight could not perceive. By means of the Festa do Rato, the *Kisêdjê* participated in a creative act that transcended the sounds. It was part of the society's social processes and institutions.

The author concludes relating to the sociopolitical context in the time of the release – 1987. The *Kisêdjê*'s performances were integrated to the context of its social definitions, but also to the context of the comprehension they had of their history and strategies to the present. They lived in the Indigenous Park of Xingu, where they lived with other indigenous groups, and there was the possibility of them losing their lands to farmers. This had an effect in the importance they saw in the singing traditions. The changes in *kisêdjê* identity, at times Seeger wrote, were fast and grounded in external events. The survival of native societies depended on how groups can mobilize public opinion to solve problems they face, and music could be an useful tool to affirm the identity of a group. In this way, it is important the conscious use of musical performances as part of the political resistance.

translation
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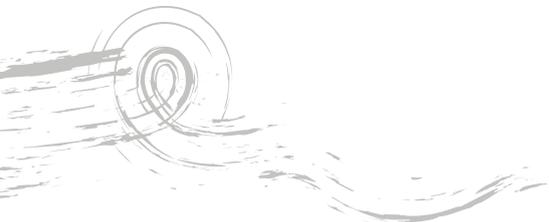
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