

Brasil Ao Vivo!: The Sonic Pleasures of Liveness in Brazilian Popular Culture

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Abstract

After a rockin' (and seriously informative) series of podcasts from Leonard J. Paul, a Drrty South banger dropped by SO! Regular Regina Bradley, a screamtastic meditation from Yvon Bonenfant, and a heaping plate of food sounds from Steph Ceraso, our summer Sound and Pleasure series gets even louder with Kaleb Goldschmidt's work on live events in Brazil.

Keywords

Music (Subfield), Acoustics, Aesthetics, Article, Crowds, Cultural Studies



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After a rockin' (and *seriously* informative) [series of podcasts from Leonard J. Paul](#), a Drtzy South banger dropped by SO! Regular [Regina Bradley](#), a screamtastic meditation from [Yvon Bonenfant](#), and a heaping plate of food sounds from [Steph Ceraso](#), our summer **Sound and Pleasure** series gets even louder with [Kaleb Goldschmidt](#)'s work on live events in Brazil. Brasil Ao Vivo! --**JS, Editor-in-Chief**

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Brazilians pray, cheer and celebrate in public and often in close physical proximity to each other. From the nearly 3 million people that flocked to Copacabana Beach to hear Pope Francis [lead a mass in 2013](#) to the huge crowds that regularly turn out for concerts at [Maracanã stadium](#), Brazilians earn their global reputation for large-scale public events. Of course there is Carnival in Rio de Janeiro and Salvador; the largest [LGBT Pride Parade](#) in the world held in São Paulo; and then there is football.

The relationship between large-scale public events and sound hit home as the country reacted to the national team's humiliating loss to Germany in the semi-final round of the 2014 FIFA World Cup. The world witnessed a different kind of public outpouring as the Brazilian public mourned. Within hours of the initial shock at the lopsided score, images of Brazilian football fans weeping and screaming in the stadium and on the street became a [humorous meme](#) with music and sound playing a prominent role. By the next day, most Brazilian football observers were taking pleasure in the public spectacle of weeping fans. With the abundance of images featuring hysteria, [videos mocking the intensity of the crying](#) went viral with dramatic musical scores. [One observer proclaimed](#) : “essa capacidade de rir de nós mesmos é uma das melhores qualidades”; the capacity to laugh at ourselves is one of our best qualities. That Brazilians express all varieties of emotions and annual passages together in public for everyone to witness, even when they border on campy excess, allow for everyone to feel the pleasures of community and the power of public performance.



“Abschlussfeier Maracana Fifa WM 2014” by Flickr user Marco Verch, CC BY 2.0

All of this led me to believe that such a public culture has an effect on the aesthetics of what performance studies scholar [Philip Auslander](#) calls “liveness” in recorded music and related viral media. Auslander argues that the appeal of liveness for television broadcasts, concerts, and other stage performances allows audiences to feel the immediacy of the moment even if the presence of mediation, such as screens and on-air censorship, is obvious. The international spectacle of Brazilians emoting *en masse*, then, has a direct relationship with Brazilian sonic aesthetics. Nowhere, I argue, is this more prominent than in the (sometimes viral) popularity of live recordings.

That immediacy Auslander speaks of spreads to many aspects of Brazilian popular culture, including the popularity of concert DVDs and albums which are regularly listed among the most popular domestic recordings. In fact, concert records tend to be more popular than the studio albums that inspire the tour. These live albums often carry the designations *Ao Vivo*, live or *MTV Acústico* (the equivalent of the Unplugged albums popular in the United States), and they are often recorded in such a way so as to feature the interaction of the crowds. In place of the draw for authenticity (a value that permeates the MTV Unplugged recordings) is the love for community, and for experiencing big emotions together no matter how obviously they are mediated through cameras, microphones and other technology. Through the example of the continued popularity of live albums in Brazil, there is an opening for a different theorization for sounding liveness; in place of celebrating canonic performances and virtuosity, the valorization of liveness in Brazil reinforces the importance of crowds and the so-called “popular classes” at the root of the politicized singer-songwriter genre MPB or *Música Popular Brasileira*.



<https://youtu.be/hcm55lU9knw>

The pleasure and preference for live recordings also extends to social media. For meme chasers, a good example of this is Michel Teló's 2011 hit "*Ai Se Eu Te Pego*." The song and video were recorded *ao vivo* before a crowd dominated by young women. A close listen reveals that sounds of Teló's female audience members are just as important as his voice even if his voice is only slightly louder in the mix. There is barely a moment in the recording when the audience stops making itself heard; the engineering revels in their presence. This is especially obvious during the opening seconds of the track when Teló and his audience sing "*Nossa, nossa / assim você me mata / Ai, se eu te pego / Ai, ai, se eu te pego*" [Wow, wow / you kill me like that / Ah, if I could get you / ah, ah, if I could get you] in unison at nearly the same volume in the mix. When the accordion and electric bass (crucial instruments for the song's *forró* style) finally enter over the screaming audience, there is a noticeable break in the tension set up by the audience and Teló singing together. Their cries, like those in other live recordings, illustrate Teló's appeal to the crowd in that moment while also allowing other listeners to imagine themselves there.

Teló's song went viral (as of this writing, the official version currently has nearly 580 million views on YouTube and over 72 million plays on Spotify), with alternate video versions teaching the song's [dance steps](#) and others highlighting global [football stars dancing](#) and singing [along to the song](#). At one point Neymar, the national team's biggest hope for World Cup victory, [sang with Teló](#) in front of a crowd. In general, Teló's live songs easily outpace his studio recordings in terms of virality, and, I would argue, that a major part of the appeal of "*Ai Se Eu Te Pego*" is its provenance in a concert setting. It is just as important that the screaming throngs of women are audible as it is for those dance steps to be easy and recognizable. The liveness of the recording is so important, in fact, that the screaming audience appears as sampled snippets in the [Pitbull remix](#). In its viral form, Teló's song united the popularity of live spectacle with Brazil's enthusiasm for other live events, merging concert goers with football fans.



<https://youtu.be/T-NYesCDypA>

The popularity of Teló's live song is not an isolated incident. Look, for example, at [record sales figures for all time](#). Two are live albums by artists who do not appear elsewhere on the list. Other albums that have sold more than 2 million copies in Brazil alone are by [Roberto Carlos](#) (*Acústico MTV*) and the teen pop/rock duo [Sandy and Júnior](#) (*As Quatro Estações ao Vivo* and *Era Uma Vez... Ao Vivo*). In 2011, five of the top ten albums in Brazil fit the *ao vivo* mode with little regard to genre: MPB stars [Caetano Veloso](#) and [Maria Gadú](#) are there alongside sertanejo artists [Paula Fernandes](#) and [Luan Santana](#). In 2012, three of the top 20 best-sellers were live albums. Meanwhile, DVDs of concerts in Brazil continue to be strong sellers. Thus, the communal pleasure palpable on-screen translates to that experienced in the home.



"Eric Clapton – Unplugged" by Flickr user Ian Alexander Martin, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

Compare this with the status of live records in the United States in the last few years where they have rarely seen any chart success. If anything, liveness continues in YouTube clips and Spotify Sessions but not in physical sales and downloads. This is probably because live albums for U.S. based artists are embedded with different values having to do with the rock authenticity rather than communal pleasure. These performances demonstrate the chops of the musician and valorize the concerts (and tours) as events. The double live albums from the 1970s such as as [Frampton Comes Alive](#), Lynyrd Skynyrd's [One More From The Road](#), and [Kiss Alive!](#) hold a prized place in the classic rock canon, often as much for extended guitar solos rather as the screaming throngs of fans. In the late '80s and early '90s live albums, especially MTV Unplugged, re-inscribed a love of liveness through acoustic instruments and songs that reached back into the roots of American popular music. Eric Clapton's [Unplugged \(1992\)](#) even topped the Billboard album charts and won 6 Grammy awards including Album of the Year while other records such as Nirvana's [MTV Unplugged in New York](#) and U2's [Rattle and Hum](#) were multi-platinum hits. While there is the occasional top-40 live single, these songs are the exception to a genre of that has moved liveness to YouTube rather than streaming and MP3 markets.

SO! contributor Osvaldo Oyola [has noted](#) there is a tension between the efforts recording engineers often go through to make studio recordings sound as immediate as possible, and those that call attention to the recording process. Live records replace the need to sound polished with the need to sound spontaneous, often reveling in mistakes and banter. That immediacy is something I enjoy when listening to live recordings and it has a parallel for many people who participate in the reception of major events in real time through social media.

In Brazil, audiences enjoy the immense power of participation in live events. As part of a larger work in progress I'm particularly fascinated by how this power and pleasure is mediated through the sonic experience of recordings and viral social media. Whether they are sharing tears over an international football loss or singing along to "Ai Se Eu Te Pego" Brazilians extend Auslander's liveness by prolonging and replaying the immediacy of the crowds to experience that shared sonic moment, again and again.

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Kaleb E. Goldschmitt is a scholar of popular music (especially from Brazil) and recorded audio media. Their book, *Bossa Mundo: Brazilian Music in Transnational Media Industries* (Oxford UP, 2020), was a finalist for the Woody Guthrie Book Prize from IASPM-US. From 2021-2024, they co-edited *Journal of Popular Music Studies*. They have taught at Wellesley College since 2016.

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