

Ricardo Andrade

It all depends on the bullet and the aim - José Mário Branco's recording activity in exile and the song as an «efficient weapon»

José Mário Branco (1942-2019) was one of the most prominent Portuguese songwriters during the 1970s. Exiled in Paris since 1963 for refusing to participate in the colonial war promoted by Salazar's authoritarian regime in the so-called "overseas provinces", it was in the French capital that he developed his early musical activity. Influenced by the first records from several singers who contested the dictatorship - José Afonso among them -, Branco performed frequently within the emerging Portuguese emigrant recreational club circuit during his early years as a singer-songwriter. The growing radicalization of the Portuguese clandestine opposition to the dictatorship had one of its main poles in France, with exiled singers having a fundamental role in raising the political awareness of migrant communities.

Following May 1968, José Mário Branco started collaborating more closely with several French artists, founding the cultural cooperative Groupe Organon. This collaboration opened him the door to the dynamic universe of Parisian recording studios, starting his recording activity in 1969 and producing records of several French and Portuguese singers. The novelty of his aesthetic proposals marked an important rupture within the scope of Portuguese "protest song" after the publication of his first LP, *Mudam-se os tempos, mudam-se as vontades* (1971), recorded at the Château d'Hérouville. In his albums, unusual attention was given to the potentialities of sound recording, going beyond the mere capture of a musical performance. If the lyrics evidenced a clear intention of social portrayal and denunciation of the Portuguese political situation, this intention was reinforced, according to José Mário Branco himself, by the sonic aspects of each song, aiming to fulfil a communicative function that was not limited to the lyrics. This stimulated, among Portuguese singers, several discussions concerning the role of the song and its political potential, aspects to be addressed in this paper.

Biography

Ricardo Andrade is an integrated researcher of the Instituto de Etnomusicologia - Centro de Estudos em Música e Dança at the Nova University of Lisbon. At Nova, he completed his undergraduate studies in Musicology, his master's degree in Ethnomusicology, and a PhD dissertation about the "boom of Portuguese rock" phenomenon of the early 1980s. His research interests concentrate in several musical domains in Portugal, including pop-rock and the protest song movement. He is a member of the project "*We must warn everyone: Music and Portuguese exile in France during the Estado Novo regime (1933-1974)*". He is also a member of the directive board of the Associação Lopes-Graça, member of the executive committee of the Observatory of the Protest Song, member of the directive board of Associação José Afonso, and curator at the Centro de Estudos e Documentação José Mário Branco - Música e Liberdade.

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