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AN OTHER-WORLDFLY TALE

Beatrice Esteve

"Eu nasci lá na Bahia, terra de Nosso Senhor" (I was born, far away, in Bahia; in the land of Our Lord) as the song goes. In addition, we lived in this magnificent old house on the Santo Antonio Hill, (the Alto do Santo Antonio da Barra #1) right next to the church. The entire Baía de Todos os Santos sprawled out below, at our feet. Sheltered and shaded by venerable, ancient, mango trees.

In the early fifties life in Bahia flowed at a gentle pace. Daddy not only came home for lunch every day. He also took a half hour nap before going back to the office in the afternoons! He changed his starched and pressed white linen suit twice daily. These were kept immaculate by armies of singing, chattering washerwomen, out in the back yard. Clothes were boiled in huge, emptied, lard tins. Spread out in the sun on the grass, to bleach. Starched with home-made "maizena" (cornstarch) goo and then ironed with black-iron irons that were fed by hot coals --- from a brazier. The women would blow to keep the embers burning. More often than not a spark or soot would land on the white suit and everything would have to begin from scratch. Nobody minded. Days passed happily, on song and banter. An occasional squabble.

In Bahia friends dropped by, informally after work on their way home. Have a drink on our terrace. Watch the sun set. The artist Carybé was one such friend. When people shared a closer friendship they would often address each other by the term of endearment: "Comadre," if a woman; "Compadre", if a man. Technically you were a comadre or a

compadre if you shared a common godchild but that was generally overlooked.

Daddy tells the story of the first time Carybé came to visit. (early fifties) With great pleasure he pulls out the black-market Scotch whiskey from a locked cabinet in the bar. In those days real Scotch was unavailable. It was all contraband and very expensive and so Scotch was only served to special guests. Carybé receives his glass. Steps out on the terrace. Whoosh.... what seems like half the content is chucked over the balustrade to the water below. Daddy jumps, horrified. "Compadre: what are you doing!!? This is real Scotch, good stuff."

Carybé smiles and says: "I know but the first sip belongs to my "saint." (Orixá)

After that Daddy made sure that henceforth, the first shot he served his Compadre was always local brew. If Carybé realized, he never let on.

In Bahia, certainly all the locals and many of the artists and Intelligentsia were followers of Candomblé. An African religion brought over by slaves. Candomblé is by far a more "people-loving" belief than any one of our Western Christian religions. Led by venerated and much loved Mães de Santo. (High Priestesses) Formidable ladies who not only held the black and local communities together but were loved and respected for their wisdom and compassion. White people also belonged. So did Carybé. In Candomblé it is believed that God, the Creator is so rarified a Being that He cannot be visualized or approached directly by man. An entire family of "saints" (known as Orixás) was created to bridge this gap and enable mankind to communicate with the Creator. These "Orixás" (a bit like Greek gods) incorporate many of our human virtues and faults making them so much more lovable, friendly and recognizable. Carybé's Orixá is the all powerful hunter: Oxóssi, lord of the forests, fields and all creatures therein. To shield them from attack by the Catholic Church these Orixás were also given names of equivalent Catholic Saints. Oxóssi is St. George, slayer of dragons. Every true son or daughter of an Orixá knows how to treat his saint with due reverence. Carybé was no exception.

A few years later, towards the end of the fifties Carybé wins a competition amongst other Latin American artists and is chosen to paint two enormous murals for the American Airlines Terminal at Idlewild International Airport in New York. In those days we certainly did not travel as we do today and it was only towards the mid-seventies that one day I look up and see these fabulous murals that looked ever so familiar. I look closer and YES, they are by Carybé. Everytime we went

through the Terminal they filled me with joy.

In early 2007, Pepe and I are embarking at the American Airlines Terminal returning home. I look up, greet my "old friends". We are being cared for by a beautiful, friendly smile, lighting up the face of this enormous black man.

"And to where will you be flying tonight, Ma'am?" he asks.

I reply: "To Brazil, São Paulo". As we walk into the Terminal I continue: "Did you know that these wonderful art works at both ends of the Hall were made by a Brazilian artist? More specifically from, Bahia, where I was born?"

He says; "Really? Did you know him?"

"Yes I replied, he was a dear friend."

Whereupon he tells me;

"And did YOU know Ma'am that in 30 days this Terminal is going to be demolished and these murals destroyed..I am sick at heart..As a little boy my Daddy used to bring me here to admire them. Everything is coming down and they will be lost forever..."

I was shocked and stunned. How is it possible, to destroy such significant art works, as if they were nothing.....Besides representing a cultural heritage they are also valuable, I tell Darren, for such is his name. Even if one does not appreciate the art, one doesn't simply wantonly destroy it.

"I know a lot of people in Bahia," I add "and I will do all I can to save the art work."

Darren stops in his tracks. Looks at Pepe and very solemnly says:

"Excuse me Sir, but I am going to kidnap your wife for a few minutes". Pepe's turn to be stunned. So shocked he doesn't even open his mouth.

Darren links his arm in mine and whisks me off leaving Pepe alone, in the middle of the Terminal. A seriously diminished Fafner, guarding the luggage. I am introduced to an American Airlines agent: Steven Wagner. He is occupied, typing on a computer. Barely looks up.

Darren says: "This lady is going to save the art works."

I stutter: "I am going to TRY and save the art works". Repeat my story. Am given another name, Mark du Pont. Emails, telephone numbers and back we go to join a still stunned -into silence- Pepe.

Next morning, upon arrival first thing I do is call Gilberto Sá in Bahia. A very special Gilberto, as he happens to be living today in our wonderful old house on the Santo Antonio. Gilberto is also an important executive in one of Brazil's major construction companies: Odebrecht. I spill out my story. Silence.

I rush on: "Do you think Odebrecht might be interested in acquiring the

murals and bring them to Bahia?"

Gentle, soft spoken Gilberto. He repeats what I already know. That Odebrecht is mainly active in the publishing of books on all major Bahia artists, including Carybé and does not buy the art works as such. BUT he says:

"You have reached me at a very auspicious moment. Tomorrow we are having a full Board Meeting. We are in the middle of a major project which is BUILDING THE NEW SOUTH TERMINAL at MIAMI-COUNTY DADE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT. Maybe we can remove the murals from New York, restore them and transfer them to Miami."

And so it was done.

A colossal undertaking. The murals were on concrete. Twenty tons worth of concrete. Had to be sliced out and fixed on to frames which were rejoined later. A mini Abu Simbel.

On June 25 the murals will be unveiled for public viewing at the new South Terminal. My lovely friend Darren Hoggard will be recognized and honored. American Airlines together with Odebrecht and County Dade have donated the murals to Miami where they have found a new home.

In Bahia the news spreads quickly.

Thump, thump, thump.....thaaarrump."

Gambás", (possums) careening wildly along ceiling boards below the rafters. Joyous gambolling. All night revelry. Above our heads. None of us can sleep. Outside in the Santo Antonio Square, pitter patter of tiny feet, scurrying up, over and about the sprawling high-ridge roots of ancient "gameleiras" (baobabs). Little field mice.

Hurry! Hurry! Hurry!

"Micos", (marmosets) racing madly from the Santo Antonio over to Mariani's hill. Tails held high. Periscopes. Steering them safely across the street. Dodging oncoming cars. "Caetana", "Veloso" and "Einstein" as Mami named them, leading the pack. Screeching scandalously. What cheek!.

Bamboo swaying. Sabiás in the tamarind.

O—XO- SSI, SI,SI, SI,SI,----cicadas at dusk. Did you hear?

SI,SI, SI,SI,SI ---, O--XO-- SSI. Mighty hunter, keeping watch over his dearly loved son. Magnanimous Oxóssi. He has long since forgiven my father his tiny foibles --- short changing him on the Scotch! Indeed! A ripple, a faint grumble; audible in the universe.

A growing rumble. A clap of thunder.

Don Pepe. The tip at JFK? Twenty-five bucks!!?

" At the very least, say I" - for a larger than life Sky Cap: Darren Hoggard. I get two kisses. One on each cheek and walk off smiling contentedly, at peace. Knowing that wherever we might be, we, children of Bahia will always remain under the protective mantles of our Orixás.

Is there a one amongst you to doubt this wondrous tale?

PD

Carybé was actually born and raised in Argentina. Came to Brazil as a young man and played the tambourine in Carmen Miranda's little band. Moved to Bahia with his also Argentine wife, Nancy where he spent the rest of his life. Became a "bahiano" and was known as the "most bahiano" of "bahianos". All his artistic oeuvre was created there.



Alegría e Festa das Américas/Rejoicing and Festival of the Americas



A descoberta do Oeste/ Discovery and Settlement of the West



Rejoicing and Festival of the Americas,
Miami International Airport, new South Terminal H. 16.5 ft. by 53 ft. mural installed
in 2009.



Discovery and Settlement of the West,
Miami International Airport, new South Terminal H. 16.5 f. by 53 ft. mural installed
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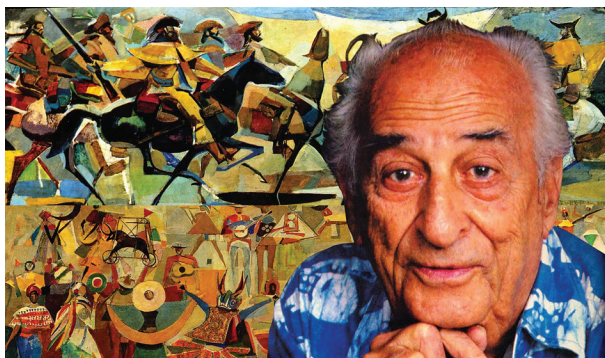
*Alabês - Tocadores de atabaques do candomblé/
Nanquim e aquarela (aguada) sobre papel - 48 X 66 cm - Sem data
Alabês - Candomblé musicians - ink and watercolor (gouache) on paper - Undated*



*Oxossi - Opô Afonjá (Logun Edé - divindade da caça)
Nanquim e aquarela (aguada) sobre papel - 66 X 48 cm - Sem data
Oxossi - Opô Afonjá - Divinity of the Hunt - Ink and watercolor (gouache) on paper -
Undated*



Carnaval (1986)



Héctor Julio Páride Bernabó or Carybé. (Lanús, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 7 February 1911- Salvador, Bahía, Brazil, 2 October 1997).

"What I know is that I went down a road and I am still on it: Amerindians, black people, South America, people, animals, light. I never meant to amaze anybody."

CARYBÉ

Having crossed the Atlantic for the first time when he was six months old, heading for his father's native Italy, Carybé was a tireless traveller and visited most parts of the world. But it was in 1938, when he was twenty-seven years old, having lived in Italy for eight years, in Rio de Janeiro for ten and Argentina for another eight that, on a bright August morning, he arrived for the first time in the city of Bahia, whose light and charms caught him in their web, and where he lived from 1950 until his last day on earth.

An expert on international artistic movements, he fought to remain true to American roots, timeless in the archaism of the themes he selected. He always avoided the hermeticism prevalent among his fellow artists like the plague, preferring to paint people, animals, plants and landscapes.

The writer, Lídia Besouchet, said of his work that "people, the most profound masses, the underworld, the crowds without universal expression" are his chosen themes. They take us to the Amerindians, black people, myths and totems, which symbolize the anti-Europe - America." The painter, José Cláudio, observed, "His painting is sacred painting, which we had not seen before because Candomblé was not considered a religion, nor was an individual from the Brazilian masses [considered] a person."

Although as an artist he preferred doing murals, as they could be seen by everyone, he mastered all the techniques of his craft: drawing, oil painting, screen painting, lithography, wood carving, printmaking, ceramics, sculpture, carving and the art of watercolor.

Solange Bernabó