

# Brazilian Fingerstyle Patterns

BY TIM SPARKS

**BRAZIL'S MUSIC IS ONE OF THE** happier products of the marriage of African, European, and Native American cultures in the Western hemisphere. Brazilian-style guitar percolates with rhythms that derive in part from religious traditions that slaves brought to the New World. In the belief system known as *Candomble*, African deities are associated with specific rhythms and tonalities. In the practice of *Batuque* and *Umbanda*, music is a bridge to the spirit world. What might seem a raucous percussion ensemble is, on a deeper level, an invocation that gives Brazil's popular music a deep spiritual subtext.

The following examples come from Nilton Rangel, who teaches and performs with the Orchestra de Pernambuco in Recife, Brazil. Their basic comping patterns are derived from the *batucada*, a percussion ensemble that figures in recreational and reli-

gious celebrations. The thumb mimics the rhythm of the *surdo*, a large bass drum. Against the thumb, the fingers pick out syncopated patterns corresponding to the *tamborim*, a small, hand-held frame drum that leads the *batucada*.

The most important point for beginning in Brazilian-style guitar is this: the thumb plays on the beat and the fingers syncopate. If necessary, you can start with the picking hand alone, using open or muted strings. When the left and right hands feel comfortable and it sounds good, you can add some fancier bass lines.

Ex. 1 is part of a family of percussive motifs known as *maracatu*. Centered in Recife, this tradition has endured since slave times. During Carnival, thousands of drummers congregate in downtown Recife to celebrate the anointing of a king for the African community.

Examples 2 and 3 are built on the architecture of Ex. 1 and reflect the style of Joao Gilberto, Baden Powell, and others who incorporated syncopated elements into the bossa nova beginning in the late 1950s. Bossa nova, roughly translated as "new wave," was a cool refinement of the exuberant samba. Solo guitar was well suited to the sensibility of the urban poets, drawing inspiration from the Africanized street slang of Brazilian Portuguese. North Americans were introduced to the bossa nova primarily through the work of Sergio Mendes, Charlie Byrd, and Astrud Gilberto, who had a huge success with "Girl From Ipanema." With songs by Tom Jobim and Luiz Bonfá, the movie *Black Orpheus* also brought the music to U.S. audiences. The central character in *Black Orpheus* is a guitarist who journeys to the underworld and duels with death in an effort to save his girlfriend.

Ex. 4 recalls the style of Gilberto Gil. The muted percussive notes are created by immediately lifting the fret hand to dampen the sound while still touching the strings. Gilberto Gil, along with Milton Nascimento, Caetano Veloso, Chico Buarque, and Joao Bosco, to name a few, re-invented the bossa nova, and the new sound became known as *tropicalismo*. Tropicalismo goes back to deep African roots in Bahia as well as Caribbean styles such as reggae. David Byrne has documented this movement by assembling an excellent series of compilation discs for Sire/Warner Bros. ■

Ex. 1

Ex. 2

Ex. 3

Ex. 4