

NOISE

SFBG MUSIC BLOG

Beating the drum for Nation Beat

By Todd Lavoie

The name might not set your world on fire, but damn these guys are on to something good: Brooklyn's [Nation Beat](#) will bring their one-in-a-billion blend of Brazilian Maracatu, Appalachian roots music, and New Orleans-style funk to the [Elbo Room](#) this Saturday, March 8. What - scared at the prospect of such brazen genre-colliding, are you? Ah, don't be, sweet cheeks. By the time the night's over, you'll have long forgotten about silly little things like musical genre-pigeonholing. Honestly, why over-think when you can just follow your feet instead?

First, an explanation to the band's name. In northeastern Brazil - the birthplace of the percussion-heavy Afro-Brazilian dance/performance style known as Maracatu - practitioners of the genre identify their ensembles with the word *nacão* ("nation"). a reference to the African

countries from where they (or their ancestors) originally came. Most groups in Recife - the epicenter of Maracatu - begin their names with the words "Maracatu Nação," usually followed by some form of geographical reference.

Now, Nation Beat plays a variant of a traditional Maracatu known as "Maracatu de Baque Virado" - literally, "Maracatu of the Flipping Beat" (baque is "beat" in Portuguese). So, the band whittled down the name from these origins and translated it back to English rather than keeping it in Portuguese. What the moniker lacks in flow, it at least compensates for in cultural reverence.

And reverent they are: Nation Beat are inspired ambassadors of Brazilian sounds which remain more underexposed here in the states than the much-loved bossa nova. Sure, these Brooklynites are prone to mix it up a bit - tossing bluegrass, zydeco, and Hank Williams into their "flipping beat" along the way - but their feisty take on Maracatu is sure to win over folks looking for new grooves. Does David Byrne know about these guys?

Led by artistic director/founder/Brazilian music scholar Scott Kettner and captivating frontwoman Liliana Araújo, Nation Beat explore the similarities between the rhythms of Recife's favelas - Kettner studied for several years with Maracatu master percussionist Jorge Martins in Brazil before forming the band - and those of New Orleans' second line, a form of traditional processional dance music often associated with brass band parades or what came to be known as jazz funerals. (Those directly involved with the funeral ceremony, such as friends and family of the deceased, were known as the first line. Those who came for the dancing in the streets were called the second line.) So, since they're delving into sounds of the south and all, why not add some twang to the jubilation? Thus, lap steel and fiddle were integrated into Nation Beat's drum-loving rumble-funk, and something truly stand-alone in its originality was born.

Last year saw the release of *Maracatuuniversal* (Modiba Productions), an engrossing collection of intersections between straight-outta-Recife percussion sessions, Bourbon Street hullabaloo, and moonshine-whiskey front porch hoedowns. "Cheguei Meu Povo" is a particular standout, switching effortlessly from samba-fied hip-shaking to Dirty Dozen Brass Band-recalling horn delirium. "Old Wooden Chair" is another highlight, melding a deeply swampy Meters groove to a curiously jazz-country hybridized fiddle riff.







Rough mixes of their forthcoming still-untitled follow-up have left me quite intrigued. Their cover of Hank Williams' "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry" must be heard to be believed! (It's currently available for your listening pleasure on their [Web site](#)) Sweet-as-pie steel guitar sighs away over a mesmerizing rollicking Maracatu rhythm while Skye Steele's fiddle sends the whole delicious ache of it all up to the

tippy-top of the mistiest of mountains. It's one of the most fascinating covers I have heard in a long, long while.

"A Onde Te Cerveza" is destined to be a future crowd-fave, thanks to its unison-chanted vocals and an everybody-out-of-your-seats groove. Then again, the same could be said for "A Vida," in which Araújo leads a call-and-response repartee with the band over a skeletal fiddle-and-percussion bob-and-weave. I wish I knew Portuguese so I could sing along!

And how's this for a compelling collaboration? According to Nation Beat's press kit, the forthcoming album (due this summer) also includes a powwow with parameter-pushing klezmer ensemble par excellence the Klezmatiks.

In the meantime, get rhythm-crazy with Nation Beat this Saturday, March 8, at the [Elbo Room](#), 647 Valencia, SF. Also playing: Brazilian soul swingers Boca Do Rio. Globetrotting DJ/intrepid tastemaker (and *Guardian* staffer) DJ Felina spins. The show begins at 10 p.m., tickets are \$10.

 digg •  del.icio.us •  sphere •  google •  Email this •  Share on Facebook

Posted by Kimberly Chun on March 07, 2008 04:06 PM | [Permalink](#)