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languages in it, that has a broad esthetic, I knew that I was making a record that sits somewhere in between. It doesn't belong in the world music niche or it doesn't fit comfortably in the indie rock niche, but it's just a reflection of what's in my head. I won't say of who I am because that is very transitory.

What was in my head and what I wanted to reflect was my experience of being an expatriate and all that. I felt like, when I had that classical guitar I felt like it allowed people to understand what I'm about.

Ah, I see he's Brazilian, he's going to play us a bossa nova or something. And I didn't like that. It might seem like a small or silly thing, but perception ultimately is what art gives us. The most important thing politically or emotionally is perspective.

*S.Z. You are long way from Brazil ... you live in Los Angeles now ... how do the cities compare?*

R.A. I grew up moving from town to town, so I'm very open. I'm not the kind of person who is homesick all the time. I miss my home, my family, the food, the smells .. but I know why I'm here and so I focus on that and I feel very lucky to be able to do what I do.

I come from a town where everything is on the street. You go out to drink on the street and you meet people on the street. You walk to the beach and everything is in the public space. That's how we are, over there. Here, it's the opposite. There is absolutely no chaos in your trajectory.

There are a million differences, but one of them is in Rio. The people who are from Rio – we are called carioca – we believe that we live in the best place in the world. The most beautiful city in the world. We are very in love with our own town.

Over here, I slowly realized, one thing that is very rich about L.A., which is that the genesis of this place: Metaphorically, (a place) to realize a dream that was said to be impossible elsewhere.

Here, I found people that are ready to form new families, based on affection rather than blood. That was very refreshing to me, and very interesting – to abandon everything I have constructed: a career and an audience and trying to write in a different language for people that do not know who I am, or don't care.

And to do that in a place where the most amount of records come out every day. It's very competitive .. and try to do something earnest and pure.

*S.Z. What is the experience of a foreigner here? Do you have that feeling? Do you identify as a foreigner?*

R.A. Well, yeah. I'm talking about that on the record in different ways, in different languages too.

Being a foreigner, being in a new place, you are all of a sudden stripped from all of the things that were around you to remind you of who you think you are. Or who you

want to be or become and what other people think you are.

We know that identity is a very fragile, transitory thing. Making a solo record, where I am making all of the decisions, the instruments and writing all the lyrics, and the whole thing, was inevitably an exercise in identity: In my case, doubting that identity or dealing with the stress of having to make it concrete even though I know that it isn't.

Being a foreigner, I grew up that way, I was in my country, but every three years I would move towns and I would have an accent. I was a foreigner all of the time. When I finally came back to my town, I had an accent from somewhere else. I had lost my hometown. My hometown didn't recognize me. Me? I didn't recognize my hometown. It was actually a freeing experience because it gave me the ability to go anywhere I wanted.

*S.Z. Racism is a widely discussed and debated issue in the United States. What does racism look like in Brazil? Have you any thoughts about the ongoing and rising rift between the public and the local police agencies that govern it?*

R.A. Racism is very different from here. In Brazil, because we are more mixed in terms of race, it is more social. The majority of black people are poor in Brazil. The way we deal with it there is very different.

America is a strong influence in the world. One example, when in America you say, "Black people," but it has shifted so that people say "African American people," right? To my ears, that sounds wrong in the sense that there is the American and there is the half American – the African American. To my ears, that sounds a little complicated. Over here, culturally it seems very separated. In pop culture and things like that. Black people in America are often portrayed as people of the sports and entertainment. And that's it. And that's where they excel. And I mean that sounds horrible to me and not constructive – and diminishing.

That said, in Brazil if you offend a black person verbally, you go to jail. And there is no bail. Why? I'm not saying that we are not racist, particularly because we have been (historically) very racist. We abolished slavery after America in 1888. We are a lot more colonial thinking than in America.

In one instance, manual labor is a lot cheaper. Many people in Brazil have maids in their houses because it's very cheap. There is still a lot of colonial thinking like that. In America it is not like that.

*S.Z. Have you any experience with or connection to the favelas?*

R.A. I grew up in the Samba School ...

*S.Z. Wait, the sumba?*

R.A. Samba School. You know what that is?

*S.Z. I don't. School me.*

R.A. The word school meaning more like a school of fish than an educational institution. It's the Samba parades that happen in Rio during Carnival.

So these groups, each one has their space where they practice and write songs and these huge drumming circles. And this is the culture of the favelas.

My sister is still a percussionist at the oldest Samba School in the country. She was the first woman to be admitted into the drum ensemble.

*S.Z. Fantastic!*

R.A. She is a movie editor and she has set up the first movie theater in the biggest favela in Rio. Yeah.

My people and my family are not from the favela, although my family is from a poor part of town. But they are a big part of my city's culture.

All it is, is poor people. It's a class thing. That's all that is.

What defines the favelas is really the geography of the city.

The favelas were illegal housing that were built on the hills of Rio where the rich people were living, not on the actual hills, but on the city. The city is surrounded by a big forest. So people started building these houses and living there because their work was for the rich, in the rich part of town.

These hills were once the Native people's from Rio's land. And of course over the years it has been taken. What defines it is that because they are on the hills and they are so tight together, for a long period of time, they last 30 or more years. The drug dealers would operate from there because it operates like a maze. For many years the police wouldn't be able to go in there. The gangsters in the favelas would take care of whatever needs to be taken care of as a form of state.

They would have a pharmacy where drugs were free. Remedies for the people were free. They would have a line and people would say, "Oh I need a toothache pain killer" and it was, "Here you go ..." there was no robbery in the favela because the gangsters wouldn't allow that. Whoever robbed someone would pay. I'm not saying it's right or wrong, just stating how it was.

Things in Brazil have been changing since the first left-wing government has been elected. We have had a dictatorship starting in '64 and it officially ended in '88, but we only had our first free presidential elections in '92.

I voted in that '64 election, I was 16 years old. And so these slow changes. When we had our first worker's party government assume the presidential palace, 10 years ago or so, then things changed quite dramatically – the economy of the country and the difference between rich and poor – which is still huge, but a lot less than it once was.

In recent years, the government managed to occupy the favelas and kick out the drug lords. It's not completely gone and the cleansing was motivated by the World Cup and the Olympics.

You asked me earlier about the differences in the countries ... There is one fundamental difference which is heavy on me. South Americans, we are naturally social democrats. We believe that the state is a union of the people to help the people. We do not associate freedom necessarily with choice, in that sense.

I know that sounds crazy to an American. In America, freedom and choice are almost one word. That comes from Adam Smith and Milton Friedman and that kind of thinking where we were led to believe that the market is like the jungle.

It's like subverting Darwin's words sprinkled with Jesus' messages to make us believe that civilization is a natural thing and it's like the jungle and we should let the strong win, the weak die – because that will make us evolve as a whole.

Individually, you should be free to choose whatever you want because in that way, you are voting with your money to increase the quality of living of everybody. That talk, of course, has reached Brazil somehow, but in our core, we are social democrats. We believe that if you pay taxes, the state should provide you the highest quality free education, should provide health care for everybody, and the police should not kill you.

*S.Z. There is something ancient about your music in many ways. I mean to say is that your music seems to be rooted in a knowledge deeper than simple songwriting. It seems there is some kind respect for something that came before you. Where does that come from?*

R.A. It's very flattering for me to hear that because I try to write music that is not following anything other than what I am trying to find for myself.

I have something that is really not very flattering – a true sense of purpose. In the end, all I want to do is serve or belong. I'm not here really, I'm not alive just to gather some stuff or to succeed in a sense that I have gathered the most amount of comfort (or praise) I can get my hands on.

I am aware that I am just writing songs. But when I do write a song, I am still trying to give some perspective to someone. I'm trying to tell a story that is worth being told. I say that humbly. I try to write music that I think could be useful.

I'm not making music to take, money or respect or fame. I make music to give.

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