



“OPEN THE PATHWAYS”

- *Interview with MC Tha* •

MC Tha's craft was woven from the beats of Brazilian funk and Umbanda drums. Born and raised in the outskirts of São Paulo, 26-year-old Thais Dayane da Silva started performing at the age of 15 in the first funk parties held in the district of Cidade Tiradentes, notable for being the sole female MC around. After taking a break in her career, she obtained a degree in Journalism and resumed her activities as a singer and songwriter, consolidating her artistic production with a merger of Brazilian rhythms, religious expression, female empowerment and the deconstruction of prejudice.

At the start of 2019, she released a video for “Rito de Passá”, the title track of her new studio album, directed by Rodrigo de Carvalho and focusing on spirituality and the bond one can develop with the Orixás. The documentary scenes in the video were shot in Nazaré Paulista – Cantinho dos Orixás, during an outdoor ritual at the Caboclo das 7 Pedreiras Umbanda worship house, located at the East Side of São Paulo.

Sur • As a black woman leading a ghetto music movement and worshipping Umbanda, how would you describe the role of your art – whether in the song lyrics, in the merger of rhythms or in the images presented in the videos – in fostering dialogue between different realities?

MC Tha • My art attempts to reunite what has been scattered apart years ago. We have a wealth of identity: both cultural and religious. But – and this is not a current thing, it's been happening for a long time – everything has been messed up with and we have been forced to swallow all of this white behavior and way of being. So, we spend our lives hating who we are, hating our own, in an attempt to follow and comply with a standard that will never belong to us, since it isn't ours by nature. Funk appeared in the favelas as an influence from Miami Bass, but it became Brazilian through the beat patterns of our worship drums. That isn't something that Funk producers understand, there is a divide: in the ghetto, God is evangelical and that's it! The rest is devil worshipping. Black people do not recognize themselves as black. So how does one uproot certainties that are already established in communities without creating conflict, in a way that makes people understand that one thing begets the other? That this person is black, making funk music – a rhythm that was influenced by worship drums from places that worship black deities? How does one do that in order to generate understanding and respect for our own bodies and history? Through art! By going back to the start and mixing it all up, with the certainty that everything is explicit within the same melting pot.

Sur • Syncretism is a strong part of multiple religious rituals in Brazil – many of which have music as a central element. Taking as an example the cover art of your album, "Rito de Passá", in which you overlap religious clothing with popular visual elements (cap, sunglasses, flip flops), what are other syncretisms and mixtures that you wish to achieve with your work?

MC Tha • I always start with funk because that was the thing that awoke my artistic senses. As I began to follow my path, I also started paying attention to other things, such as the lack of appreciation for everything that is produced in our country – and, going even further, the despise and delegitimization towards everything that is produced directly in the ghetto, the strength of the notion of what is "standard" and Brazil's non-secular character. My mixture is an attempt to continue disobeying all of these little rules: stating religious preference, providing more opportunities to marginalized artists from the ghetto, fighting for funk to be classified as Popular Brazilian Music (MPB), and reactivating the memory of Brazil's rich and plural culture. How could we ever erase Brazilian culture, religion and colors?

Sur • In view of the rise in religious intolerance seen in Brazil in recent years, especially towards religions of African origin, how important to you is it to make yourself seen and profess your faith openly and without reservation as an artist?

MC Tha • I was raised in Cidade Tiradentes, at the far east side of São Paulo, and, ever since I was little, I saw some heavy things around me. My mother always said that there is no middle ground. I am sure that this established my character, my desire to be in control of my own life, from a very early age. We need courage to stand for who we are. To state our preferences without fear. I am now aware of how much this matters to people, because MC Tha is possibly becoming

this big network of support and safety, I guess. But before that, I only understood myself as a normal human being, living her life within her religion.

Religious intolerance is becoming stronger exactly because most of those adherent to evangelical churches are taking over everything with hate speech disguised as God's word: there are churches everywhere in the ghetto, their preachers hold services in public squares, they have screen time on televised broadcasts, to say nothing of our evangelical representatives in congress. Now, where are the people that follow Afro religions? I understand that there is some fear involved, but we need to respect ourselves in order to be respected! And that lack of self respect starts when we deny our own faith, our own people and saints!

Sur • The lyrics and video for “Rito de Passá” are loaded with ritualistic references. Could you tell us about the creative process behind this video and what it represents to you as the leading manifestation of your new phase?

MC Tha • I wrote “Rito de Passá” when I finally severed the ties that prevented me from fully dedicating myself to music. I received a very specific influence from the worship house and became much more secure from the moment I understood my nature and settled my spirit within these psychic developments. I think I've become calmer and wiser in dealing with multiple issues. In “Rito de Passá”, I took this encounter with the sacred as a means to salute and state my gratefulness. Nature explains everything and rites of passage occur every day. When I finished writing, I understood how [the song] had to be – my musical work is very much grounded on my intuitions: I understood that it was an opportunity to clarify through confusion. A funk that recalled a ritualistic chant and vice versa, precisely to bring forth and expose the similarity shared by both. I kept the lyrics to myself for a while until I suddenly had the intuition that I had to speak to Tide (DJ and producer), because he was the only one that could make that statement through musical production. When I spoke to him and explained myself, he told me that he was just in the middle of a research about the similarity between jongo and funk. After it was produced, I started to think of the music video. I wanted it to have some connection to Umbanda rituals, but without being disrespectful, fake or plastic in any way. I met Rodrigo de Carvalho and understood that he needed to watch one of our rituals, so he went and took some footage. Months later, we recorded the video and, with the permission of my pais de santo (Umbanda priests), we included ritual scenes during the editing process in a specific part of the video. These scenes strengthen the entire act that occurs before and after, in my solo scenes: the bath, the smoking, the dances, the candles. It was essential to include these images during the video so it wouldn't have a fantastic character. Umbanda is not a fantasy.

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Interview conducted in August 2019 by Renato Barreto (Conectas Human Rights). Translated by Luis Misiara

NOTE

1 • A rhythm derived from electronic music and based on the Roland TR-808 drum machine, which spread throughout the world, especially in Latin America, influencing many other musical genres, such as the funk produced in the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo.



RITO DE PASSÁ

Images taken from the music video directed by Rodrigo de Carvalho | 2019





