

# Theater: Brazilians Offer a Legend in Bossa Nova

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### Arena Conta Zumbi' at St. Clement's Church

ARENA CONTA ZUMBI, a play by Augusto Boal and Gianfrancesco Guarnieri with music by Edu Lobo. Performed by the Arena Theater of São Paulo, Brazil, in Portuguese with a running narrative in English; musical direction by Theo de Barros; staged by Mr. Boal. Presented by the Theater of Latin America, At St. Clement's Church, 423 West 46th Street.

The company: Lima Duarte, Renato Consorte, Antonio Pedro, Rodrigo Santiago, Cecilia Thumin, Zezinha Duboc, Germano Batista, Vera Regina, Theo de Barros, Jose Alves, Anunciaçao.

By HENRY RAYMONT

THREE low-key Brazilian instrumentalists and eight singing actors tried out the Afro-bossa nova on their first American audience last night, wondering if the rock-obsessed generation had left any room for the jazz-tinged variant of the samba.

They hardly expected to duplicate the kind of frenzy generated by the raucous rock and soul music that drew more than 400,000 youths to the Woodstock Festival last weekend. Modestly, they chose to appear at the 150-seat St. Clement's Episcopal Church at 423 West 46th Street.

But the capacity audience, including many long-haired and bearded youths, moved happily with the syncopated rhythms of the sambas, choros, marchas and other Afro-Brazilian tunes that made up the songs and choruses of the Arena Theater of São Paulo's American debut.

Their production, "Arena Conta Zumbi" ("Arena tells about Zumbi"), is an exciting romp of a musical play dramatizing the 17th-century slave uprising led by Zumbi and his sons and grandsons in northeast Brazil.

Outwardly, the plot—written by Augusto Boal and Gianfrancesco Guarnieri—might impress American audiences as a Brazilian version of William Styron's "The Confessions of Nat Turner" set to music.

But the Portuguese dia-



Members of the Arena Theater group of São Paulo in "Ave Maria," from "Arena Conta Zumbi." From left are Cecilia Thumin, Vera Regina, Zezinha Duboc and Lima Duarte.

logue, written in 1965—a year after Brazil's military seized power—is peppered with allusions to the present situation, such as Lima Duarte's comical pleading "No, Mr. C.I.A.," when an official spots him as a possible dissenter while the enfeebled governor exhorts landowners to crush the rebellious slaves.

The object of the political satire is to suggest the analogy between the colonial empire's suppression of the slaves in 1695, and the military junta's stiff controls on Brazil's freedom of expression 270 years later.

Beyond the political implications, the play reflects the humor, social tolerance and passionate humanism that have marked Brazil's history since the colonial era, and have helped accommodation to win over violence in every major crisis.

The company, directed by Mr. Boal since it started 10 years ago, displayed a pro-

fessional cohesion with the musicians that made the performance electrifying. One must mention Renato Consorte, the curly actor who shuttles between the roles of Zumbi and the governor, changing his voice from a gusty baritone to an affected falsetto, and the transformation always is amazingly apt.

The two-act musical was performed on the converted church's bare stage without even the help of multimedia aides, so popular in Off Broadway productions these days. Instead, the cast relied on natural grace and refreshing vitality to dramatize the story of Zumbi through songs, dance and pantomime.

The score, a taut fusion of Brazilian folk and popular music, was written by Edu Lobo, one of Brazil's best-known composers of bossa nova. It was compellingly performed by Theo do Barros,

guitar; Anunciaçao, percussion, and José Alves, double bass.

The New York performances—which, it is hoped, will be extended to Washington and some university campuses—are sponsored by the Theater of Latin America, Inc., with the help of a grant from the Rockefeller Brothers Fund.

By a coincidence, the play began its two-week run just as literary critics were hailing a new Brazilian novel, "Doña Flor and Her Two Husbands," by Jorge Amado, translated by Harriet de Onis. The book, published by Alfred A. Knopf, is a superbly alive portrait of Brazilian society.

Together, the two events may help whittle down what Augusto Federico Schmidt, Brazil's foremost modern lyrical poet, described as "the wall of silence" that has kept the United States from learning more about his country's culture and psychology.