



Pop friction: performing Canada at the Festival Internacional da Canção Popular

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Canada-Brazil relations through the prism of a music festival, the Festival Internacional da Canção Popular, held in the wake of the 1964 military coup. Using sources (in French, English, and Portuguese) collected through multi-site research (Montreal, Ottawa, and Rio de Janeiro), it demonstrates that Canadians' half-hearted, uninspired performance between 1966 and 1969 resulted from their perception of the South American giant as largely irrelevant – and too foreign – with regard to domestic and external priorities. Their elitist and tepid approach to music diplomacy was also a function of their failure of imagination in the making of international cultural relations. Not only did the Department of External Affairs and cultural officials in Canada fail to comprehend how popular music could be rendered valuable in the centennial decade and amid an upsurge of nationalism in the predominantly French-speaking province of Quebec, but they also found themselves complicit with the Brazilian dictatorship's efforts to embellish its image through a spectacle of sound and light.

Tension pop: le Canada mis en scène au Festival Internacional da Canção Popular

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article examine les relations Canada-Brésil à travers le prisme d'un festival de musique, le Festival Internacional da Canção Popular, organisé au lendemain du coup d'État militaire de 1964. S'appuyant sur des sources (en français, anglais et portugais) recueillies à Montréal, Ottawa et Rio de Janeiro, il démontre que la performance peu inspirée des Canadiens entre 1966 et 1969 résulte d'un désintérêt marqué pour le Brésil, et ce, tant au niveau des politiques intérieures de leurs pays que celui des politiques extérieures. Leur approche élitiste et apathique de la diplomatie musicale trahit aussi un manque d'imagination en ce qui concerne les relations culturelles internationales. Le ministère des Affaires étrangères et les fonctionnaires de la culture au Canada sont non seulement incapables de mettre à profit le potentiel mobilisateur de la musique populaire face à la montée du nationalisme dans la province du Québec durant la décennie du centenaire, mais ils se retrouvent aussi complices de la dictature brésilienne dans les efforts qu'elle entreprend pour rehausser son image à travers un spectacle de son et de lumière.

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There was excitement in the air, the week of 21 September 1969, as delegations from all over the world arrived in Rio de Janeiro to compete in the Festival Internacional da Canção Popular (FICP). Among them was Marc Gélinas, a Montreal-born actor and singer-songwriter of some renown. He was there as a hastily chosen emissary to represent Canada. It was his song “Avec une chanson” that would feature in the fourth edition of the FICP and be performed by his compatriot Guy Boucher, an artist who had a modest success in Quebec and was also a last-minute choice for the event. The one thing that struck Gélinas upon landing in Brazil was the size of the other countries’ delegations, which included photographers and journalists. He and his wife Marie-Andrée Bélanger were a lonely duo, and they had a crisis of their own to deal with because Boucher had failed to join them on their southbound flight. To make matters worse, there was no Canadian ambassador on hand to greet the couple; Yvon Beaulne had recently left his post and his successor, Christian Hardy, had yet to present his credentials. After days passed with no news from or about Boucher, Gélinas realized that he would have to sing to save face. So as to accommodate his limited vocal range, he decided to substitute the song “Consuelo” for “Avec une chanson”, but was disqualified for doing so. One word conveyed his first experience as an impromptu cultural envoy: deception (Vincent 1969, 3).

How could one explain such ineptness? What did it reveal about Canadians’ commitment to make their country better known on the world stage using culture? What did it communicate about their relationship to Brazil? What was Gélinas’s role in this? “Le Canada n’a pas le droit de négliger le plus grand Festival de la chanson au monde”, he rightfully decried upon his return to Montreal (cited in Vincent 1969, 23).

Canada’s Department of External Affairs (DEA) was, truth be told, a newcomer in the realm of cultural diplomacy. It had equipped itself with a Cultural Affairs Division just three years earlier, mostly as a response to the province of Quebec’s own foray into the realm of international cultural relations (Rushton 2009, 86). The 1961 opening of the Maison du Québec in Paris, with the explicit support of France’s Charles de Gaulle, constituted a direct challenge to the prerogatives of the federal government of Canada. Spurred by a renewed language nationalism, it was founded on the notion that the predominantly French-speaking province’s domestic areas of jurisdiction (specifically education and, to a certain extent, culture) should extend to the global arena. The DEA’s sudden interest in cultural matters was reactive more than proactive, and it was for the most part directed at the Francophone world where Quebecers were most active, not South America.¹

Besides, Brazil did not rank high on the DEA’s list of priorities. In addition to dealing with the challenges posed by Quebec’s pursuit of an international identity, the department was busy consolidating Canada’s status as a dependable partner in the North Atlantic region while trying to chart an independent liberal internationalist course alongside the United States amid a Cold War climate of insecurity and risk containment. Whereas Cuba, for example, provided Canadians with constructive opportunities to occasionally speak with an autonomous voice, Brazil was deemed a distant and largely irrelevant stage.² The DEA was therefore inclined to follow the United States-led status quo there in the aftermath of the 1964 military coup that ended the left-leaning presidency of João Goulart. Canada’s uninspired participation at the FICP must be examined within the context of this broader foreign policy agenda.

Occurring as it did during the early years of what would be a brutal twenty-one-year dictatorship, the FICP could hardly be described as an apolitical event. Preceded by a national competition during which Brazilians picked their contender, the two-part festival gave visibility to local talent while projecting a youthful and jubilant image of Brazil. It was a contested terrain in that it initially served as a forum for articulating divergent views about the past and the future. Yet it also helped create conditions for the suppression of oppositional voices and the promotion of a state-sanctioned consensus around culture. Festivals are often *both* “nation-builders” and “internal political devices” (Fabiani 2011, 94; Ravenscroft and Matteucci 2003, 1). They are also effective nation-branding instruments. In a letter to the Canadian ambassador, Carlos Rocha Mafra de Laet, minister of Tourism for the state of Guanabara, explained that the FICP “did not and does not have commercial characteristics, seeking exclusively to assemble in Rio the music of every country without discrimination, honoring its composers and performers and thereby promoting greater understanding among the peoples” (Mafra de Laet 1967). There was evidently more than that to the festival, but such a message helped attract contenders from all over the world, including reluctant Canada, and it made for good branding.

Cultural diplomacy is, among other things, a means for states to assert some control over their image and messaging overseas. It creates opportunities to exert influence on the discursive and symbolic connections that culture activates at home and abroad. This paper approaches the FICP from the perspective of Canada to better understand the costs, or rather the implications, of not seizing these opportunities in politically charged contexts. A footnote in the history of Canadian-Brazilian relations, Gélina’s presence in Brazil – like that of his predecessors Allan Blye and Jimmy Dale (in 1966), Donald Lautrec (in 1967), and Paul Anka (in 1968) – calls attention to the ambiguous yet important roles that artists could play in the making of international and intercultural relations. It reveals the extent to which domestic cultural life shaped how Canadians engaged (or not) with the world. Between 1966 and 1969, the DEA and cultural officials in Canada failed to understand, let alone value, popular music’s ability to influence perceptions at both ends of the hemisphere. Not only was their tepid approach to cultural diplomacy complicit with the Brazilian dictatorship’s efforts to embellish its image through a spectacle of sound and light, but it also arguably lent legitimacy to the idea that it was in Quebec’s best interest to take charge of its own image. In approaching the festival half-heartedly, they missed a timely opportunity to advance the domestic agenda using an international stage.

Setting the stage

“[O Festival Internacional da Canção Popular] proporcionará um espetáculo de rara significação e repercussão”, explained Negrão de Lima, governor of the state of Guanabara, at a press conference held on 29 April 1966 (cited in “Negrão lança” 1966, 10). The event was the brainchild of Augusto J. Marzagão, a former journalist and occasional political consultant with experience in export marketing. He had been on the campaign trail next to Lima the previous year, helping him transition from a career in diplomacy to one in politics as the governor of a state, whose borders aligned with those of a formidable city: Rio de Janeiro, the country’s cultural center and former capital. It

was through this connection that Marzagão was able to rally support for a festival that would celebrate the *cidade maravilhosa* as the “capital mundial da música popular” (“II Festival Internacional da Canção Popular” 1967). Other key partners included TV Rio and later TV Globo, as well as the Cudil and Philips record labels, who would produce compilation albums, along with the state’s Secretaria de Turismo, for commercial sale or for distribution to embassies and consular offices. Brazil’s Ministério das Relações Exteriores (commonly known as the Itamaraty) was enthused by the endeavor, and it helped promote it in addition to sending out invitations to the various foreign diplomatic corps scattered between Rio de Janeiro and the new capital Brasília.

The Canadian embassy received its invitation to the FICP on the eve of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. The opening of the legation in 1941 and its subsequent upgrade to an embassy, a little over two years later, had been responses to profound changes brought about by the outbreak of war in Europe. With the conflict disrupting their respective transatlantic trade networks, Canada and Brazil had hoped to consolidate their bilateral economic ties in response to the United States’ increasing political and cultural dominance of the hemisphere. Marked improvements in two-way trade and investment had followed. The two aspiring middle powers had also gotten to know each other better through an ambitious – albeit improvised – intellectual and artistic exchange program. Born amid the urgencies of war, their relationship had bloomed in the 1940s only to wither during the subsequent decade.³ There were talks of moving the embassy from its Rio de Janeiro location to Brasília in the early 1960s, but the costs associated with such a project were prohibitive, and therefore difficult to justify unless absolutely necessary. Firmly rooted in Rio de Janeiro, Canada’s diplomatic corps could at least expect to be close to the action during the FICP.

The Canadian embassy had once been known in Brazil as the “embassy of art and culture”, thanks to the pioneering efforts of Jean Désy, an unorthodox diplomat who wore many hats – impresario, patron of the arts, and cultural mediator, among others – while serving as minister plenipotentiary and then as ambassador between 1941 and 1947 (Costa 1946, 25). One of the high points of his years in Rio de Janeiro was the signing in 1944 of a far-sighted bilateral cultural agreement, the first of its kind for Canada, aimed at facilitating closer relations between the two countries. Presented as something of a *fait accompli* to Désy’s superiors back home, it launched a decade of intense activities that centered mostly around the ‘high arts’ of classical music and painting. The DEA was never enthusiastic about the agreement as evidenced by how quickly it downplayed its significance and purposely buried it both to avoid having other countries seek similar agreements and to stay clear of constitutional difficulties with provinces. Paul Beaulieu, Canada’s ambassador to Brazil in 1966, inquired about the possibility of reviving it in the wake of the creation of the Cultural Affairs Division; he was unsuccessful (Chantal 1966). Beaulne, his successor, tried again two years later to lift the agreement out from “the very bottom of the Department’s priorities”, but was told that there was “little immediate prospect of increased activity in this area” (Beaulne 1968; Gadd 1968). The DEA was busy prioritizing Europe where Cold War tensions remained acute, and in particular, “the countries from where the largest ethnic groups of Canada originate” (Gignac 1966).

This apparent indifference toward Brazil explains in part the Canadian response to the coup of 1964. Starting in 1960, the Brazilian military watched with apprehension the

country's leadership move to the left of the political spectrum. Faced with a creeping national debt, inflation, and a polarizing economy of haves and have-nots, Brazilians opted for the Soviet-friendly Jânio Quadros in the October election. In office for seven thorny months, he ceded his presidency to the equally left-of-center Goulart who garnered popular support with his nationalization and land redistribution program. Fearing a slide toward communism, the military launched a coup with the perceived implicit support of the United States on 31 March 1964. By 1966, the military had placed Marshal Humberto Castelo Branco at the helm of the country, neutralized the official political opposition, suspended civil rights, and launched a campaign of repression that would lead to the arrest, imprisonment, torture, and exile of dissidents. The Brazilian elites were not overly alarmed by their government's authoritarian turn since they stood to benefit from the political and economic stability that it promised. Indeed, the military regime's technocrats secured huge sums of money from the United States and international agencies to restructure the economy. They brought inflation down by sixty-four percent in just a few years and successfully renegotiated the country's foreign debt all the while maintaining a ten percent growth rate through a diversified staples export strategy led by coffee, oranges, and soybeans, among other products. The dictatorship's austerity measures hurt the poor and working class the most while the middle class appeared content that an economic collapse had been avoided. As for foreigners with investments in Brazil, they reaped significant dividends, which helped assuage concerns regarding the illiberal practices of the military (Skidmore 1999, 176–183).

In the immediate aftermath of the coup, Canada refused to either denounce or recognize the new regime. Instead, it chose simply to “continue formal relations” with the military, thereby acknowledging that it had “effective control of the territory” (Cadieux 1964; Pick 1964a). This faint response was a means to prudently assert some autonomy vis-à-vis the United States, which was prompt to recognize the new government. It also reflected the belief that democratic principles were expendable in the search for economic stability and the fight against perceived communist threats in the distant and foreign Global South. At first glance, such a position may have seemed like a departure from the ‘Golden Age’ of Canadian foreign policy, a period that extended from the 1940s through the 1950s, and during which Canadians embraced a liberal internationalist mind-set in their efforts to assume an apparently disinterested leadership role on questions of peace and security. In fact, the DEA's approach to diplomacy had always been “cautious . . . and pragmatic, echoing long-standing domestic imperatives” informed by Canada's Cold War commitments and close ties to the United States (Chapnick 2008, 205; Donaghy 2009, 2).

The Canadian embassy in Brazil, then, did not depart from established practices. In Rio de Janeiro during the coup, Beaulieu – who explicitly asked to not spend more than one tour of duty there, after “five years at [an] unhealthy post” in Lebanon – lived through “troublesome, but historic days” (Beaulieu 1963; Pick 1964b). Aiming for a reassuring tone, Canada's diplomatic staff reported paradoxically that the coup aimed to create “the conditions in which a democracy can exist” (Canadian Embassy 1967). Their dispatches described the new regime as a “government of good progressive administrators” who deserved praise for attempting to put their house in order and for aligning their country, economically and ideologically, with its North American Cold War allies (Beaulieu 1964). The Canadians on the ground in Brazil explained that the

“literate classes” who “feel they have been cheated” by the rise of populism and self-serving politicians could therefore be forgiven for turning a blind eye to the regime’s illiberal practices (Chargé d’affaires 1965). Beaulne was quick to concur with this assessment upon arriving in Rio de Janeiro: “[T]he people that count, for want of a better word the middle class of functionaries, military officers, intellectuals, the business and industrial community in particular, have their minds focused on the material challenges before them and the quest for economic betterment” (Beaulne 1967). According to him and Beaulieu, Brazil was a less advanced society where different standards could be tolerated if they served the interests of the normative international order.

In this context, the FICP’s internationalist pretensions were unlikely to elicit an enthusiastic and ardent reaction from either Beaulieu or Beaulne, let alone their DEA colleagues who were content with the status quo in Brazil, not to mention their indisposition to taking new cultural diplomacy initiatives, particularly in the area of ‘low culture’. Their disinterest in the power of popular music as a diplomatic tool stemmed in part from an elitist preference for classical music and the visual arts, aesthetic modes of communication associated with elite milieux where decision makers and peoples of influence congregated. Although disinclined to significantly invest resources and energy into cultural affairs, the DEA had in the past offered some support to the likes of pianist Glenn Gould and composer Ernest MacMillan, but the department was not going to trouble itself with crooners and jazzmen. Its staff was evidently not cognizant of the fact that popular music performers could help shape – to one’s advantage – public opinions and attitudes in other countries.

The Canadian embassy in Brazil was first notified about the FICP in March of 1966. It forwarded the invitation to a perplexed DEA who asked: “BY ‘POPULAR SONGS’ DO YOU MEAN FOLK SONGS OR JAZZ AND ROCK AND ROLL SONGS OR BOTH?” (Wallis 1966). The distinction was not trivial since traditional folk music, unlike more modern and commercial sounds, was by then wrapped in an erudite discourse of origins and nation. The festival’s response that any kind of popular song was eligible for entry and that this was an all-expenses-paid trip did not matter really, since the department thought it best to stay out of the field altogether, directing the embassy to forward the invitation to private organizations and agencies. Peter M. Dwyer, associate director of the Canada Council for the Arts, echoed his External Affairs counterparts when he explained that “since popular music is largely self-supporting, we have had little occasion to provide it with financial assistance and consequently do not pretend to any particular expertise in this field” (Dwyer 1966). This was a backhanded snub if there ever was one.

Managing the stage

However much the FICP was hailed as a celebration of national and international culture, the fact is that the event did not – could not – exist outside the specific reality of post-coup Brazil. Taking place amid the global sixties, a period of “growing dissatisfaction with the existing political, socioeconomic, and cultural status quo”, the festival initially provided a stage where divergent views and competing agendas collided, and where new solidarities emerged through cultural transfers (Klimke and Nolan 2018, 6). A place of bonding and participation, of liminality, it may have been both a battleground for civil society and a “verdadeiro sucesso diplomático”, but it was also a venue where authorities

could contain and defuse disruptive discourses and practices (Fléchet 2011, 266). Marzagão arguably had no illusions about this. While he hoped that the festival would engage Brazil's youths, helping them cope under military rule, he also believed that it would benefit the country's international image by displaying order and stability, public participation and popular contentment, economic strength, and goodwill (Marzagão 1966; Mello 2003, 249). His associates in the state of Guanabara and the Itamaraty shared that view.

Three sonic fault lines ran across the stage of the FICP. Having achieved consecration in the United States at the turn of the 1960s, bossa nova had a clear head start. Yet many believed that this highly popular jazz-like, syncretic music was not authentically Brazilian, because it had presumably been contaminated by foreign influences. Its pleasant, apolitical tone appeared out of place in post-coup Brazil, especially once rumors began to circulate that the North American hegemon had played some role in Goulart's overthrow. Whereas some musicians carried on undeterred by such criticisms, many others adopted a more militant posture to maintain their pertinence and confront the challenges facing their generation. Francisco 'Chico' Buarque de Hollanda excelled at evading censors by using a type of lyricism that veiled his social commentaries and his attacks on the military. In 1967, he wrote a satirical play titled *Roda vida*, which dealt with an artist who commits suicide to free himself from deceitful establishment figures. The performance of the theme song during the 1967 edition of the FICP went smoothly, but the play itself was interrupted by the authorities. Buarque did manage to throw another punch at the dictatorship in 1968 using, once again, the FICP as a platform. Cowritten with Antônio Carlos Jobim, "Sabiá" is a song of longing that evokes one's exile into an idyllic Brazilian past; an image that stood in sharp contrast with the cloud of repression weighting over the country (Napolitano 2017; Leu 2006; Perrone 1989). The song went on to win first place in the national and international phases of the competition. Characteristically, it also earned criticisms from more vocal opponents of the regime.

Protest music offered rallying cries to large segments of Brazil's youths in the mid-1960s. Its widespread appeal assured it a place on the stage of the FICP. *Música popular brasileira* (MPB), a term that encompassed a range of post-bossa nova genres, initially called for a nationalist and politically engaged posture, which meant a rejection of foreign influences and a revisiting of traditional musical styles. Supporters of MPB tended to champion acoustic music over rock-infused songs that leaned too heavily on US-American or British trends. They also expected performers to be free-spoken, if not bold, in their social commentaries (Leu 2006, 37; Napolitano 2017, 137). Audiences in the 1968 edition of the FICP were therefore upset when Geraldo Vandré's "Pra não dizer que não falei de flores", a pro-democracy anthem promptly banned by the military, finished second after Buarque and Jobim's "Sabiá". Ironically, members of the audience were themselves becoming more rigid vis-à-vis nonconforming artists who sought to articulate their generation's dismay (Dunn 2001, 137).

Caetano Veloso and the group Os Mutantes, vanguards of the Tropicália movement, could hardly be surprised when their 1968 performance at the FICP raised a real hue and cry. Blending traditional Brazilian music with psychedelic rock, they provoked those in attendance with a loud and chaotic performance of "É proibido proibir", a direct reference to the Parisian anti-authoritarianism protests of May 68, which the musicians directed at both the audience and the military regime. The defiant artists called for

Brazil's youths to reject the status quo while thinking more creatively and self-confidently about ways of engaging with other cultures. They invited festivalgoers to join them in assuming an "immediate posture of being-in-the-world" (Dunn 1996, 121). Manifestly, the FICP had become an important stage where performers and audience members embraced a new culture of participation in their efforts to situate themselves amid turbulent times.

The fact that musicians were able to voice their opposition in this way did not mean that the dictatorship was benign. It did mean, however, that the authorities had perhaps overlooked the possibility that dissidence could spread through ostensibly apolitical musical forms popular among middle- and upper-class youths (Napolitano 2001, 48). The military caught on by 1968 when it gave up all appearances of preparing for an eventual return to democracy. Branco's successor, former War Minister Marshal Artur da Costa e Silva, adopted a hardline approach that translated into increased censorship and social control as well as a more aggressive repression of dissent. Buarque had already exiled himself to Italy when "Sabá" was chosen as the winner of the 1968 edition of the FICP. As for Vandré, the audience choice for national contender with "Pra não dizer que não falei de flores", he left for Paraguay after the competition. Veloso and fellow 'tropicalista' Gilberto Gil also went into exile in 1969 after a short stint in prison. Discordant voices were thus expurgated from the FICP in the closing year of the decade (Mello 2003, 297–302; Dunn 2001, 146–147).

The first four editions of the FICP encompass the arc formed by the festival's seven-year history, capturing the essence of its evolution from a site of multiple discourses and practices to one of consensus under the shadow of the military regime.⁴ It follows the trajectory of the country's political history from democracy to crisis and dictatorship. The festival's highs and lows were many during these four years. They ranged from inadequate budgets to poor acoustics, controversies regarding the jury selection process, disagreement with broadcasting partners, subversive artists and discontented audiences, as well as growing censorship and repression. A few months after the closing of the fourth edition, a fire caused serious damages to the Maracanazinho stadium where the festival was held. The venue and the FICP survived the turn of the 1970s, but the ambiance changed starkly once the military regime consolidated its grip on culture and politics. Zuzana Homen de Mello, in his study of festival culture in Brazil, notes how the fourth edition provided an apt metaphor of Brazilian society: a well-lit and colorful stage, which served as a distraction to star-stricken and bedazzled festivalgoers who failed to see the violence deployed by the authorities backstage (Mello 2003, 349). Singers from all over the world, including Canada, helped keep the spectacle afloat.

Taking the stage

An analysis of the contender selection process reveals that the DEA and Canada's national broadcaster, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), were averse and poorly equipped to mobilize popular musicians, which resulted in their losing control of the cross-cultural messaging to the benefit of Marzagão, who seized the occasion to set the agenda. The DEA failed to act when it was first notified about the festival in March of 1966. Instead, it invited the festival's organizers to solicit the help of private organizations to recruit a suitable Canadian candidate. The Canada Council for the Arts was no more

helpful since it had no expertise in the self-supporting realm of popular music. Pressed by Marzagão and the diplomatic corps in Brazil, the newly established Cultural Affairs Division eventually reached out to the CBC who agreed to find a representative song and select an appropriate singer. With less than three weeks to go before the competition, Canada had yet to submit a title and a name. The FICP tried to take matters in its own hands by contacting Anka who declined for family reasons. The Secretaria de Turismo then shamed Canadian diplomats in Rio de Janeiro by reminding them that they were the “only participating country without [a] singer nominated” (Rio 1966). This promised to be an impactful festival with contenders coming from places as far away as Sweden, Austria, and Israel. At least the CBC had picked the song it wanted to feature, “It Never Came to Be” by Allan Blye and Jimmy Dale, and on the basis of this, the broadcaster decided just days before the event that it would send the two very talented, but largely unknown, artists to Brazil.

The following year, perhaps chastened by the diplomatic embarrassment associated with the inaugural festival, the CBC designed an elaborate scheme to find a contender for the FICP. Taking its cues from Brazil, it planned to launch a national competition that would culminate with a special program during which the winner would be announced. But even this strategy did not sit well with the Brazilians, who had high hopes after the United States announced that it would be sending Quincy Jones, an acclaimed African American composer and producer. Concerned that things were moving too slowly, the incredulous Marzagão violated his own rules by reaching out to Lautrec, a rising global star, without consulting either the CBC or the DEA. Offended by this breach of protocol, Canadian authorities believed that “some form of protest” would be in order, but it was too late: Lautrec had accepted the invitation (Zimmerman 1967). Canada had, once again, fallen short of expectations and proven unable to take advantage of its growing cultural infrastructure.

This latest turn of events had unexpected repercussions in that it impeded the efforts deployed by the management group of the Canadian Corporation for the 1967 World Exhibition to secure Brazil’s participation in Canada’s centennial celebrations, specifically Expo 67, which was scheduled to take place in Montreal. The management group and the DEA sent delegations to Brazil to cultivate interest in the event. They also proposed strategies that ranged from helping finance the Brazilian pavilion in exchange for assistance in the construction of the new embassy in Brasília to luring Brazilian participation with the promise that an international soccer tournament would be held in parallel to Expo 67. And when these proposals failed, the DEA contemplated bringing the centennial to Brazil by using unexpended funds to send Canada’s delegate to the FICP on a countrywide tour. But that plan fell through when Marzagão reached out directly to Lautrec instead of letting the Canadian selection process run its course (Munro 1967).

By staging their country in its domestic context, the Brazilian authorities could control better the message and parameters. It was also more viable financially since existing infrastructure could be used and public-private partnerships secured without having to worry about the fluctuating value of the country’s currency in the global arena. Besides, it was more expedient to bring the world – its delegations of artists and journalists – to Brazil rather than the other way around. Marzagão’s interference in the contender selection process is evidence of how important the festival was in energizing domestic culture while bringing visibility to Brazil and improving the country’s international

image. Amazingly, despite reassurances that the FICP would not again undermine the Canadian selection process through unilateral and arbitrary actions, Marzagão repeated the same scenario in 1968 when he finally persuaded Anka to accept his invitation rather than working with Canadian authorities (Gignac 1968). When he finally held to his promise the following year, the comedy of selection errors took another turn when the CBC, now in full control of the process, was embarrassingly unable to find a suitable candidate.

It is easy to understand why Marzagão was so determined to have Paul Anka compete at the FICP. The Ottawa-born singer was one of the most widely acclaimed Canadian pop artists at the time. Brazilian audiences were anxiously awaiting the return of the former teen idol whose stage, radio, and television performances had caused quite a commotion in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo in 1960 (“Rei do ‘rock’ chegou ontem” 1960, 8). Having him on the stage of the festival would be a great marketing coup. Born in 1941, Anka masterfully used his well-rounded music education to propel himself to stardom as a singer-songwriter. In 1957, he traveled on his own to New York City to audition for ABC-Paramount Records. With contract in hand, he recorded “Diana”, which peaked in music charts throughout North America. By the end of the decade, he had recorded several other major hits in addition to writing for acclaimed performer Buddy Holly and touring throughout the world. He appeared in four feature films while also starring in the pioneering direct cinema film *Lonely Boy*. Anka subsequently reinvented himself as an easy-listening pop performer by joining the likes of Frank Sinatra in Las Vegas. Although it was a different singer who would be returning to Brazil, Marzagão did not doubt that his presence would still be an asset for the FICP.

Canada’s other participants were about the same age as Anka. Reaching their teens in the prosperous late 1940s and early 1950s, they grew up in the golden age of television as well as with the rhythms of jazz and rock ‘n’ roll. Born in London, Jimmy Dale arrived in Canada in 1947. Schooled in music theory and composition, he performed in various dance bands and orchestras throughout Toronto before securing a job at the CBC. There, he met singer-songwriter Allan Blye who had started working for the broadcaster while still living in his hometown of Winnipeg. The two men were respected artists despite being relatively unknown beyond Toronto and the CBC. Donald Lautrec, on the other hand, was an international star in the French-speaking world. Born in Jonquière, north of Quebec City, he started off as a touring acrobat and had his first taste of stardom as the bodyguard of crooner Michel Louvain. In 1961, he decided to try his hand at singing. His success was near-instantaneous. By 1967, he had recorded several hit records, including “Manon, vient danser le ska”, had starred in the musical film *Pas de vacances pour les idoles*, toured in France, finished in third place at the 1967 edition of the Sopot International Song Festival, and recorded the theme song for Expo 67: “Un jour, un jour”, translated into “Hey Friend, Say Friend”. Marc Gélinas and Guy Boucher, who were a last-minute selection when the CBC dropped the ball in 1969, were artists of merit, but not ones that could compete with either Lautrec or Anka.

Apart from age, the artists who made up Canada’s uneven talent delegation from 1966 to 1969 shared an important trait in that they were all white male performers. Lautrec and Anka were the uncontested stars of the group. The former’s status as one of the most elegant and most handsome men of the festival was rewarded with articles that celebrated his masculinity, from his tall and imposing body to his love of sports and women. Photos

showed him towering over his fans, most of them *garotas*, when not seductively wrapping his arms around Gracinha Leporace, a contender from Brazil, in the garden of the Canadian embassy (Soares and Beatriz 1967, 18; “O belo Lautrec” 1967, 3). Likewise, Anka’s charm and fearlessness in sports were presented as masculine attributes that complemented his iconic persona (Anibal et al. 1968, 24). Although his childhood classmates called him “the black Syrian” because of his Middle Eastern heritage, his Christian upbringing and cultural standing in Canada and in the United States alongside Holly and Sinatra marked him as resolutely white in the 1960s (Anka 2014, 10; Diffrient 2017, 29). Both Anka and Lautrec helped substantiate an image of Canada that centered on whiteness. Moreover, neither of them challenged established gender norms in their performances on stage and offstage. Their public image – like those of Blye, Dale, and Gélina – was no doubt a reassuring one to members of the diplomatic corps who were used to navigating in the predominantly white, male-dominated spaces of state-to-state diplomacy.⁵

Whereas the United States had been recruiting African American artists as impromptu ambassadors for more than a decade, Canada had yet to do the same. The Dwight D. Eisenhower administration had actively promoted jazz overseas as a weapon in the cultural Cold War. Its program of government-funded tours promoted, through the medium of improvisation, the ideal of democracy and freedom among the youth in nonaligned and Soviet bloc countries. Occurring as it did in the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education*, when the courage of civil rights activist Rosa Parks and the resilience of the Little Rock Nine students seeking to enroll at an all-white school made headlines around the world, the State Department’s attempt to instrumentalize the music was also a means of improving the United States’ international image (Von Eschen 2004; Davenport 2009). Canada was not as heavily involved in the cultural Cold War, and it was not at the time grappling with a similar image problem. In no way was this an indication that racism did not exist there. Nor did it mean that the country had been forever white. What it did indicate, however, was that the DEA had successfully put forward an image of Canada that centered on those white settlers who traced their origins to the French and the British empires. The Montreal-born, world famous jazz pianist Oscar Peterson rightfully decried the fact that, while his costars in the United States traveled the world as official envoys of the State Department, the DEA snubbed him throughout the 1950s and 1960s (Barris 2002, 183–184). This was a function of the department’s disinterest in supporting popular music, but also Canadians’ own “bigotry” and their “smugness about race relations” (Peterson 2002, 335).

There was no shortage of talent in Canada, both men and women, including the Black Canadian award-winning vocalist Shirley Matthews, the acclaimed Indigenous singer-songwriter Buffy Sainte-Marie, and Shirley Harmer, who had graduated from the CBC’s *Four for the Show* to the *Johnny Carson Tonight Show* in the United States. Although Matthews and Sainte-Marie were no doubt disqualified on racial grounds, Canada’s national broadcaster had considered – audaciously perhaps – sending the Oshawa-born Harmer to Brazil in 1966, but she declined when she learned that no funds were available to cover her husband’s travel expenses (Ext. Ottawa 1966). Ironically, the big hit of the Canadian delegation that year was Dale’s wife, Irene, who was not a singer but who earned the FICP’s “Golden Rooster Award for top elegance” and was interviewed by *O Globo* about fashion, shopping, and housekeeping (“Moda ‘mod’ no Canadá” 1966).

This unforeseen moment of fashion diplomacy, however sexist, was noteworthy enough for the embassy to mention in its report that Dale's wife had "created an excellent impression, particularly attracting favorable attention for her fashionable wardrobe" (Canadian Embassy 1966).⁶

Canada's diplomatic corps in Rio de Janeiro was visibly paying attention even if the artists themselves did not really understand their role as impromptu cultural envoys. Blye and Dale traveled together to the first edition of the FICP to perform "It Never Came to Be", a song they cowrote at the request of the CBC. They did not make it to the finals, but their "warm and attractive personalities" won Canada much goodwill according to embassy staff: "[The two performers] were splendid informal 'ambassadors' and reflected credit on Canada in everything they did, thus reaching a wide segment of the Brazilian public perhaps previously unaware of Canadian competence or achievement in the field of popular music" (Canadian Embassy 1966). The evidence (or lack thereof) suggests that the DEA was not inspired by the report. Blye and Dale were indeed at ease in Brazil, going as far as hosting a breakfast event for local media representatives at the hotel Copacabana Palace. "Thrust in the situation", they did not clearly understand their role as envoys for Canada, but they at least felt some loyalty to their employer, the CBC, for having selected them (Blye 2018).

Marzagão's meddling in the internal process of the CBC, the broadcaster's handling of the situation, and the DEA's detached role meant that the artists who were selected to perform in Brazil did not necessarily understand that they were to act as 'informal ambassadors'. Although it was obvious that they had been selected to represent Canada, they did not know to whom they were accountable in the performance of the nation. While the embassy in Rio de Janeiro reported positively on the socializing skills of Blye, Dale, and Lautrec, it seems that, as singers and songwriters, they saw themselves primarily as performers operating in the globalizing realm of pop culture. They were therefore inclined to think in transnational rather than national terms, particularly since cultural critics and institutions in Canada were just beginning the process of 'canadianizing' popular music (Edwardson 2009, 242). Nor did it bolster their sense of patriotism that the Canadian delegations were smaller, compared with other countries who sent reporters to cover the achievements of their artists. A case in point, France maintained a strong and visible presence at the festival, and the Parisian media assiduously covered the event to the benefit of artists and audiences on both sides of the Atlantic (Fléchet 2013, 264–266). Reflecting on his experience many years later, Lautrec acknowledged that he never saw himself as needing to carry out ambassadorial duties on behalf of Canadian culture, and he approached the festival much as he treated every performance with his image and identity as a singer predominating above all else (Lautrec 2018).

The Canadians who stood on the stage of the FICP also were for the most part oblivious to the internal politics of Brazil. They were reminded by embassy staff that the country was ruled by the military, but they did not necessarily grasp the full extent of its powers in civil society, including its treatment of artists. Lautrec's experience is revealing of how successful the FICP was as a public relations campaign. The singer's stay in Rio de Janeiro and his visit to Bahia were carefully scripted to foreground the image of Brazil as a racial democracy while substantiating the idea that the country was run by a benevolent regime. Lautrec was chaperoned for most of his trip. In addition to visiting key tourist attractions, he toured the city's embassies, attended

a voodoo-like ceremony, and witnessed a capoeira performance, all of which left a deep impression on him. The concentration of contenders from all over the world at Copacabana Beach and the energizing atmosphere at the Maracanazinho stadium made Lautrec forget that Brazil had taken an authoritarian turn. The military did its part by entertaining performers with motorcycle acrobatics as they made their way from their hotel to the festival site. It was only when he visited the country as a tourist later in his life that he began to realize how naïve he had been in 1967, and how artful and delusive his hosts had been in projecting Brazil through the festival scene (Lautrec 2018).

The DEA and the Canadian diplomatic corps in Rio de Janeiro were largely to blame for this gap in understanding since they failed to brief the artists or provide them with any context about the decades-long history of political and cultural relations between the two countries. Instead, the perception of Brazil held by contenders at the FICP came primarily from the popular music, specifically bossa nova, that they had discovered courtesy of their familiarity with the US-American entertainment industry. The sounds, dance steps, and essentialized symbolic representations of musical ‘Others’ sold albums, which is why Lautrec had recorded French-language versions of Billy Strange’s “Limbo Bossa” and Elvis Presley’s “Bossa Nova Baby”. As for Anka, he followed the lead of Sinatra who started the year 1967 in the studio with Jobim. That summer, the Canadian singer recorded a live album that featured three works by the Brazilian composer: “Insesatez”, “Meditação”, and “Corcovado”. Although their appropriation of the music was inspired by a genuine interest in its aesthetic qualities, it was also opportunistic. That said, Dale and Blye did hear in bossa nova sounds of resistance and collective self-affirmation that they hoped could galvanize Canada’s soundscape amid a climate of heightened cultural nationalism. In an interview with *Correio da Manhã*, they confided that Canadians are seeking their own voice and they are “tired of always being the little brothers” of their US-American neighbors (cited in “Artistas presos na Urca” 1966, 5). If they – like Lautrec and Anka – imagined that they could set themselves apart by seeking inspiration in Brazilian sounds, they were to some degree misguided, because the bossa nova that they engaged with came for the most part filtered and repackaged through the United States.

Canada’s contenders were as a result not conversant with the peculiar cultural politics of Brazilian music, and this was particularly evident throughout the tempestuous 1968 edition. Anka had missed most of the action, which had taken place earlier during the national phase of the FICP. Yet it was difficult to not sense the tension in the air with the audience still reeling from the performance of the ‘tropicalistas’ and the knowledge that “Sabá” was making its way to the international competition. Many in attendance were still bitter that Vandré’s “Pra não dizer que não falei de flores” had been withdrawn in favor of Jobim and Buarque’s song. They promptly manifested their dissatisfaction upon learning that the duo had won first place in the international phase. The boos and jeers were deafening. Anka, who finished second with his song “This Crazy World”, praised the jury and lamented the disrespect shown to his Brazilian counterparts. But his position was inevitably informed by his personal connection to the bossa nova star’s music rather than his understanding of domestic politics. As if to unintentionally underline how ill attuned he was to the politico-cultural climate in Rio de Janeiro, Anka risked further upsetting disgruntled festivalgoers when he stated that Jobim should be named “world

ambassador for Brazilian music” (“Cantor sugere a nomeação de Tom Jobim para embaixador” 1968, 2).

On first listen, “This Crazy World” seemed to emerge out of global sixties meditations. Anka himself claimed that his song was in response to the troubled state of the world (“O que eles disseram” 1968, 3). Had “This Crazy World” been written by a Brazilian artist, it likely would have raised concerns among censors, but its author had the privilege of being an English-speaking performer from Canada with a distinguished career in the United States. Regardless, the song’s musical form and lament-like lyrics were far from constituting an anti-war or an anti-authoritarianism anthem. A more militant stance would have been out of character for Anka considering his reluctance to openly discuss his political views. When asked by a Brazilian journalist to comment on the war in Vietnam, he politely replied that he could not discuss the topic as a Canadian living in the United States. He added, however, that he was a pacifist and that card-carrying, flag-waving protesters would not change the world (“Paul Anka teve medo de ser ridículo” 1968, 32). His political posturing sounded hollow in the context of late 1960s Brazil.

The controversies and confrontations that had exploded in 1968 were largely subsided by the time Marzagão launched the fourth edition of the FICP. However, the less volatile climate was due in no small part to a hardening of the military regime’s hold on authority and its more aggressive position vis-à-vis urban subversives and guerilla groups in the countryside. Dissenting artists had been silenced, if not imprisoned or forced into exile, when the 1969 edition of the FICP came around. Moreover, the spectacle of the festival itself had also been fine-tuned to ensure consensus and discipline. By the time Gélinas landed in Rio de Janeiro, the military junta was firmly entrenched. He and his wife were on their own since no ambassador was available and Boucher was nowhere to be found. The singer, the couple later found out, was in a hospital recovering from a car accident (“Acidente fêz vir Gelinas em lugar de Guy Boucher” 1969, 1). Gélinas had no choice but to stand in behind the microphone for Boucher, but he was disqualified when he decided to sing “Consuelo” instead of “Avec une chanson”, the official entry for the competition. The organizers nonetheless allowed him to perform to avoid further humiliation. It was a mere consolation. In a supreme irony, Gélinas, who had never signed on to participate in the FICP as a singer, let alone as an ambassador, left Brazil in a state of political angst, certain that he had inadvertently damaged Canada’s image through this trying episode.

In sharing his thoughts on the matter with *La Presse*’s Pierre Vincent, Gélinas implicitly made the point that Quebec’s image too was tarnished through this ordeal. The reporter picked up on this: “il pensait sûrement dire: le Québec” (Vincent 1969, 3). Not many representatives from the local media in Montreal paid attention to the festival, and the few who did were inclined to see Lautrec and Gélinas (and Boucher, until news reached them that he had not traveled to Brazil) foremost as ambassadors for their French-speaking province. By the mid-1960s, they could pride themselves on having a thriving popular music scene, much of it echoing the language and cultural nationalism that underlay the political and economic vision championed by the architects of the Quiet Revolution, a period of rapid transformation that saw Quebecers assume command of their own affairs in ways that prefigured the rise of the sovereigntist movement in the 1970s. The DEA and the CBC’s mishandling of the FICP file was problematic, if only in the ways in which it threatened to undermine Quebec’s own pursuit of an international identity using culture, including popular

music. Canada's debacle in the fourth edition of the festival added substance to the belief that Quebecers had to take charge of their own international image, and that they were best positioned to speak for and represent French-speaking Canadians overseas.

It is tempting to see the shift between English and French, from one year to the next, as evidence that the DEA and the CBC were mindful of domestic politics, and that this – in some ways – shaped the Canadian representation at the FICP. Established in 1963, the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism had published its preliminary report the year before the festival launched. It articulated a plan to transcend the country's two solitudes, putting forward the idea of official bilingualism and sketching a course of action to provide French-speaking Canadians with greater economic and political opportunities. It aimed to offset the rise of nationalism in Quebec by promoting “equal partnership between the two founding races”, a common expression used at the time in reference to French- and English-speaking descendants of white settlers (Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism 1967, xxi). As state broadcasters, the CBC and its Francophone counterpart, Radio-Canada, were expected to champion a similar vision although the latter tended to sympathize with the more autonomist (and subsequently sovereigntist) tone of Quebec politics in the 1960s. However, Marzagão's interference with the selection process meant that neither the CBC nor the DEA could take credit for alternating between English and French as a means of giving equal voice to the country's two largest linguistic groups. Although Vincent hypothesized that it was the “politique (avouée ou inavouée) des organisateurs du festival”, that assertion was not correct either since Marzagão had not chosen the candidates for 1966 and 1969 (Vincent 1969, 23). If Blye and Dale's “It Never Came to Be” was followed by Lautrec's “Je ne t'en veux pas”, Anka's “This Crazy World”, and Gélinas's “Avec une chanson”, it was pure coincidence.

Distant stage

In telling the story of Canada's less-than-stellar participation at the FICP, this article brings into focus a largely forgotten episode in Canadian-Brazilian relations. A public event taking place amid the politically charged climate of post-coup Brazil, it provides visible and audible cues that can tell us much about the ways in which Canadians approached the making of cultural diplomacy, and where they positioned themselves vis-à-vis their South American counterparts. In other words, examining the country's diplomatic past through the prism of a music festival offers valuable insights into the nuts and bolts, as well as the cultural values and assumptions that shaped the direction of Canadian international history. Canada's performance at the FICP was emblematic of a relationship past its prime, one deemed not sufficiently important to warrant genuine commitments and bold initiatives that could upset the status quo, and thus Canadians' sense of place in the North Atlantic triangle. It was also messy, like most cultural diplomacy initiatives. Yet in treating Brazil like a negligible distant stage, the DEA inadvertently found itself serving the interests of Brazil's military regime to value spectacle over cultural authenticity in the geopolitical realm. Whether through inaction or poor leadership, the DEA and the CBC conveyed the message that Canadians were willing to tolerate some deviation from democratic principles by a perceived partner

country aiming to ward off the virus of communism, especially if – like Brazil – that country existed on the periphery of the world as they knew it.

Overall, the whole experience did little to aid Canada's international image in Brazil. The country was a mere shadow of its former self in the late-1960s. The lack of leadership on the cultural front would make it increasingly difficult for Canadians to get noticed and accumulate the necessary goodwill to tackle difficult issues; the dispute between the aeronautics giants Bombardier and Embraer being one of many emerging sore points in the two countries' relationship (see Potter 2008, 213). If it did not aggravate French-English tensions or provide additional immediate impetus to Quebec's foray into the realm of international cultural relations, it certainly demonstrated that the DEA – in failing to comprehend how popular music could be rendered valuable in the centennial decade and amid an upsurge of nationalism in Quebec – lacked both the means and vision to project a positive image of a bicultural and bilingual Canada. The department would do better in the 1970s and 1980s, notably in the Francophone world, despite a disinclination to learn from past mistakes and to champion a proactive rather than a reactive approach. Not only was the FICP fiasco a fumbled attempt to juggle the domestic and international agendas in the Global South during the Cold War, but it was also a failure to mobilize artists and harness culture's potential to mediate new connections to the idea of nation and to the word.

Notes

1. For studies of Quebec's place in the Francophone world, see Paquin (2006), Gendron (2006), and Meren (2011, 2012). For works that focus on civil society and the hemispheric relations of the predominantly French-speaking province, consult Demers (2014) and Mills (2016).
2. Canada-Cuba relations have so far captured most of the attention in scholarly discourses about Central and South America. Whereas Canadians like to boast about the exceptional nature of those relations, recent studies have brought nuances to the idea of Canada's autonomy in its response to Fidel Castro's regime (Wright and Wylie 2009; Hansson 2016; Tabío, Wright, and Wylie 2018).
3. Rosana Barbosa recently published a survey of Canadian-Brazilian relations in which she argues that the two countries' "position as satellite economies" of the United States determined the nature of their interactions. To a great degree, her synthesis of the relationship between the two aspiring middle powers reproduces the top-down, state-centric motifs that characterize traditional Canadian diplomatic history, although it also successfully brings to the fore a neglected history worth pursuing (Barbosa 2017, xv). See also McDowall (1988) as well as Armstrong and Nelles (1988) for a discussion of the economic dimension of Canada's rapprochement with Brazil. Note that portions of this article build on the author's ongoing research on Canada-Brazil cultural relations (Fillion 2021, 2022).
4. The focus here on the first four editions is also a function of the fact that the archival trail, in both Brazil and Canada, dissipates after 1969. Quebec's Luc and Lise Cousineau did travel to Rio de Janeiro in 1970, likely at their own initiative, after a chance encounter with Augusto J. Marzagão at another festival in Europe. He was at that point clearly disillusioned with Canada, and apparently would have preferred an English-speaking performer instead of a French-speaking duo. The DEA had not followed up on the invitation it had received in June of 1970. Described as pathetic and mediocre, the artistic couple's presence at the festival went largely unnoticed ("Au festival de Rio" 1970, 8; Gagnon 1970, 71).
5. "[R]ace has been a constant in Canada's international relations, shaping policy, practice, identity, and alignment in both obvious and subtle ways", write Madokoro and McKenzie (2017, 7). The collection of essays that they edited with David Meren is one of a series of

recent works that underline the structuring weight of race – and thus also whiteness – in Canadian international history (Madokoro, McKenzie, and Meren 2017). See also Price (2011) and Touhey (2015) as well as Dubinsky, Perry, and Yu (2015).

6. Only a few works have underscored the importance of examining the gendered nature of Canadian foreign policy (Keeble and Smith 1999; Sjolander, Smith, and Stienstra 2003; Donaghy, Campbell-Miller, and Barker 2021).

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