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Brazil is more than the samba

Success often brings curious consequences.

The impact of samba and bossa nova in North American pop music has been so pervasive that, 30 years after their heyday, not much else is known about Brazilian music.

Artists such as Milton Nascimento, Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil, Djavan and Ivan Lins have become better known in the United States but, basically, they represent only one strain of popular Brazilian music. Several compilations, including an ambitious series by David Byrne, have attempted to fill gaps. And Paul Simon's "The Rhythm of The Saints" called attention to other aspects of Brazilian music. But much remains unexplored, especially the rootsier styles and rhythms.

Now Brazilian musicians are taking matters into their own hands — and some record labels are listening. Recent releases by pop keyboardist, composer and arranger Sergio Mendes and avant garde jazz saxophonist Ivo Perelman, two artists who represent opposite ends of the popular music spectrum, are the latest examples.

A passionate player with a big, rough-edged sound, saxophonist Ivo Perelman surprised critics and audiences with his first album "Ivo" (K2B2, 1989.) There were comparisons with Albert Ayler, Pharoah Sanders and late-period Coltrane. There was also much hyperbole about his place in jazz. Some of it, it turns out, might prove justified.

For "Children of Ibeji" (ENJA, CD only), Perelman enlisted an impressive cast of players, including pianists Don Pullen and Paul Bley, bassist Fred Hopkins, drummer Andrew Cyrille and vocalist Flora Purim for explorations based on the music of *Candomblé*, an Afro-Brazilian religion.

To their credit, the results illuminate both the jazz avant garde and Afro-Brazilian tradition from unusual angles.

Rather than Ayler, whose work Perelman says he listened to only after comparisons surfaced, his most obvious influence seems to be Argentine saxophonist Leandro (Gato) Barbieri.

Barbieri, once a hard-core avant-gardist, achieved commercial success in 1973 with his soundtrack for "Last Tango In Paris." But throughout the '70s Barbieri also produced a remarkable series of albums examining folk music of Latin America with a jazz sensibility.

Perelman not only echoes Barbieri's growling sound and brawny romanticism but also his interest in simple themes and forms and plain harmonies.

Pieces such as "Chant For Oshun," and "Chant for Logun" are

based on invocations to the *orixas*, deities of Candomblé, and each has a certain mood reflecting the attributes and personalities of these orixas. "Mina do Sante" and "Little Rock of Aruanda" are Brazilian folk songs.

Rather than flashy scales or bop-derived patterns, Perelman favors a very melodic, and methodical, approach. Now and then he breaks the pace by interjecting cries and screams, two octave jumps and altissimo passages — but he never loses sight of the overall design. When he moves out of the realm of traditional music — as in Antonio Carlos Jobim's "O Morro" or Suzanne Vega's "Tom's Diner" — Perelman approaches them almost as children's songs.

In fact, children are the subject of the album. Deeply concerned by accounts of murder of street children by paramilitary groups, Perelman set out to "tell about it in my own way — through music."

In this context, his blend of playfulness and searing pain takes on deeper meaning. The tales of violence are also part of the reality of Brazil.