Rock Band and Traditional Brass, Marching From Brazil to Broadway

Orquestra Contemporânea de Olinda

David Rubinstein Atrium

BEN RATLIFF

MUSIC REVIEW

It's been a while since a band from Pernambuco, the state in the northeastern promontory of Brazil, made a deep impression in the United States. People will tell you about the singer Chico Science, who died in 1997, and his fantastic band, Nação Zumbi. They're still missed. Their aggressive, guitar-and-drum-centric Brazilian rock burst with sound and imagery about the complexity of Brazilian cultural identity, about limited resources and technological curiosity. It also sounded good on a beach.

But those old heads from the '90s generally only know about it

Orquestra Contemporânea de Olinda performs Saturday at S.O.B.'s, 204 Varick Street, at Houston, South Village; sobs.com, (866) 777-8932.

because Chico Science's records, released worldwide by Sony Latin, made their way into our market, and because the band toured our major cities. The Pernambuco scene, once incredibly promising, has since grown murkier for North Americans. Brazilian small-release CDs are hard to come by, and it's rarer now to see a Pernambucan band make a northern invasion.

A new and encouraging sign, though, comes from Orquestra Contemporânea de Olinda, which played its first American gig on Thursday at Lincoln Center's Rubinstein Atrium. It's a contemporary rock band collided with a traditional brass band, with drum rhythms leavening the mixture. It's joyous and unpretentious and it gets over like crazy.

Olinda, just outside of Recife, has busy local artisans and an intense, small-scale carnival tradition; it's obsessed with folklore as living tradition. The ten-piece Orquestra furthers that relationship between very old and very new. The guitarist Juliano Holanda, with his fuzzed-out Fender Telecaster, and the singer and percussionist Tiné, with his notched stick and scraper, were both doing the same thing: scratching out percussive sounds. Likewise the tubaist Alex Santana and the electric bassist Hugo Gila, bumping out the low end. Likewise the conga and military-drum percussionist Gilú and the trap-set drummer Rapha B, making the music swing, slow and fast.
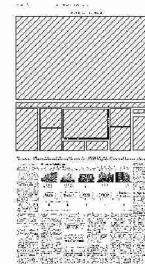
On Thursday the Orquestra played its own local sounds and rhythms, particularly frevo — frenetic brass-band music — as

well as maracatu, the stately Afro-Brazilian beat. It also played "O Pato" ("The Duck") — made famous 50 years ago by the bossa nova singer João Gilberto — which was counterintuitively cool: a huge version, booming with horn punches, of a quiet, dryly funny song. And it got into Jamaican rhythm, including a ska version of the James Bond theme, borrowed from the Skatalites.

Rubinstein Atrium isn't very friendly to the sound of the drum. It's long and narrow, with very high ceilings. But the band figured out a few good ways to use the room. At one point, Maciel Salú — the deeper-voiced and more traditional of the band's two singers — belted out an aboio, a calling-song of cattle herders, with Tiné adding light harmony; it sounded passed down through centuries, and filled up the space. And at the end, in an all-out frevo, the band marched off the stage, through the crowd and out to Broadway, where an overflow crowd had stood watching through the open doors for an hour and a half. Olinda has a few things in common with New Orleans, where this band heads next week. Something tells me they'll do well there.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHAD BATKA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The Brazilian band Orquestra Contemporânea de Olinda (in foreground, Tiné, Gilú and Maciel Salú) at the David Rubinstein Atrium. The group had no trouble moving its fans to dance, below.