

Orfeu Negro

Orfeu Negro (Camus 1959) is regarded as key for Brazilian cinema for bringing *bossa nova*, *samba* and a romantic portrayal of the shantytowns of Rio de Janeiro to the world, despite being a French production. As *samba/bossa nova* is a crucial aspect of this film, there are two contending interpretations as to its meaning in the soundtrack. One regards it as truly innovative and a means for the expression of national identity, combining multiple cultural expressions such as *samba/ bossa nova* and shantytowns, while selectively and creatively drawing from Greek mythology, thus fitting what Deleuze would have called an instance of ‘minor’ cinema, despite its European director. The other regards it as counter to the world it seeks to depict, in fact actually working against the representation of happy shantytown dwellers—happy *favelados*—and depicting hardship, refuge, solace and love in the life of Afro-Brazilians. Here I provide a background to the way this film has been traditionally understood, then examine the main scenes where *samba/bossa nova* is played, and after careful analysis of the music and lyrics, with its socio-cultural connotations and subtexts, I conclude that although both interpretations are plausible, in its moving depiction of Afro-Brazilians as artists, *Orfeu Negro* can be considered an instance of minor cinema: a liberating cinema, free of the colonizer’s expectations and one of the multifaceted expressions of Brazilian identity.

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