



# Tropical Truth: A Story of Music and Revolution in Brazil

*Caetano Veloso*

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## **Tropical Truth: A Story of Music and Revolution in Brazil** Caetano Veloso

Rebelling against the Elvis-based, American-imported rock scene in late '60s Brazil, Caetano Veloso suffused lyrical Brazilian folksongs with fuzz guitar, avant-jazz, and electronic music-and in doing so blew apart the status quo of Brazilian culture. Caetano and the movement he catalyzed, *tropicalia*, urged an adoption of personal freedom in politics, music, and lifestyle. His "rabble-rousing," as the government saw it, would get Caetano and his comrade Gilberto Gil arrested and exiled to London to wait out the military dictatorship. His fame increasing by the year, Caetano focused on writing songs about his homeland, returning to Brazil as a national hero-a mantle he still wears today. His most recent album, *Live in Bahia*, was released to international critical and popular acclaim.

## **Tropical Truth: A Story of Music and Revolution in Brazil Details**

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Author : Caetano Veloso

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# From Reader Review Tropical Truth: A Story of Music and Revolution in Brazil for online ebook

## Steph says

Wonderful first-hand account of the absolutely astounding counter-culture movement of Brazilian Tropicalia, from one of its architects who paid for the privilege in jail time and several years in exile. I learned a lot from the robust histories of samba before and some MPB after.

I have page after page marked with names of artists who'd previously slipped by my hunger for Brazilian music, and several beautiful passages to boot. And to hear Caetano consistently be a fanboy for Gil is totally sublime. :-). Occasionally the sensual honesty was challenging for me, but felt absolutely true to Caetano's voice and work.

"E preciso estar atento e forte  
Nao temos tempo de temer a morte!"

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## Kris says

Liked this book a lot, mostly for the narrative voice. It reads like a grandfather's recollections sound, if you are fortunate enough to have a grandpa as badass and brilliant as Caetano. It's riddled with digressions, super patchy and disorganized. That makes me love it more, though, in this case. The shape is very personal to the storyteller. And the story is wonderful: a nuanced musical rebellion against the military regime in Brazil, and also the knee-jerk leftist reactionaries. I feel this book has a lot to say to the USA, with entrenched revolutionaries on both sides and not much in the middle.

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## Peter says

I'll admit I didn't finish the book. Though I love what I know, I don't have a very strong knowledge of Brazilian music. Veloso tries to make the history approachable for the uninformed, but he's talking about music, mostly, so without knowing what these things SOUND like, it's all just too abstract to follow the chains of influence. This isn't helped by the writing style - I respect that he takes his subject so seriously, but it seems a bit overly academic and intellectual, and leans towards long, fairly convoluted sentences which I could probably parse if I wasn't also keeping tabs on who everybody was and what songs they sang, etc. To be fair it's hard to know how much of this is Veloso's intention and how much is the work of a translator.

What I loved about the book was the sense of he and his peers building a cultural movement that *mattered*, mostly because they believed it did. This belief that art has a power (beyond its power as a commodity) to transform life is one of the main things missing in America today! I'd love to steep myself in the music of some of the main reference points and come back to the book someday.

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## **Rupert says**

Caetano and his writing somehow take a fascinating subject that happened in one of the most exciting periods of recent history and turn it into a so-so book. Worth reading for the information, but a tough plow. I want to read Tom Ze's version!

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## **Tristan Alaba says**

Loved reading this, despite not knowing Caetano or his music that well, as I'm interested in the musical movements in Brazil through his lifetime ~ pretty well written, some amazing insights, would recommend to those leaning towards reading.

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## **Gabriela Ramos says**

Têm muitos pontos que fez me encantar imensamente com esse livro. Mas acredito que os principais seriam a forma da narração de Caetano e como ele aborda a história do tropicalismo com um panorama histórico e autobiográfico. E faz isso genuinamente, misturando a personalidade com a criticidade. Parece que ele está do nosso lado contando a história em uma conversa íntima. Além de seu olhar sobre os acontecimentos que é bastante único, ele é daqueles que enxerga mínimo e consegue descrever sensações e sentidos bem tocantes ao leitor. Conseguiu reunir grande conteúdo teórico de forma leve e muito rica para quem se interessa pela música brasileira. Sem contar nas inúmeras referências aleatórias sobre cultura em geral, a cada página uma nova personalidade, filme ou música à ser descoberta.

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## **Fred says**

Interesting autobiography from a key member of the tropocalia movement of Brazil in the late 60's. The majority of the book is recalling encounters with his peers, the inspirations for many of his songs; the usual stuff of an entertainer's memoir. What sets it apart are the chapters detailing his sudden and unwarranted arrest on the morning of New Year's Day, 1969. What happened? What made Veloso and tropocalia so dangerous to the military regime in control in Brazil at that time? It seems ridiculous now, but he and many others were either jailed or run out of the country (in Veloso and Gilberto Gil's case, both) for questioning not the government, but the musical traditions of their country. It is in this section of the book the author details not only the waking nightmare of being thrown in prison without trial or even an explanation, but a harrowing slide into paranoia and deprivation that very nearly claimed his sanity. His resolve and recovery in this bizarre Orwellian nightmare is truly inspirational. An illuminating book on a little-known but highly influential period in music history, which has since influenced everyone from The Talking Heads to Beck and The Flaming Lips.

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## **Deke says**

Caetano Veloso is a genius and his story is an important one, but alas I found this book a bit of a slog -

names, dates, locations, concerts - all important to his tale, which would be far better received by a Brazilian who grew up in and around his culture. In other words, very insider-y.

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## **Jacob Wren says**

Caetano Veloso writes:

I remember my walk from the Solar to the movie theatre where *Land in Anguish* was playing. It must be said that I found the film even more uneven than *Black God, White Devil*. [Both films by Glauber Rocha.] The lamentations of the main character – a left-wing poet torn apart by conflicting ambitions to achieve the “absolute” and social justice – were at times frankly sub-literary. In addition, certain intolerable conventional shortcomings of Brazilian cinema – high society parties staged unconvincingly, female extras encouraged by directors to enact deplorable provincial caricatures of sexy glamour, an overall lack of narrative clarity – these were all in painful evidence (though less intensely.) Yet as in Glauber’s previous films and a great many other Cinema Novo productions, suggestions of a different vision of life, of Brazil, of cinema, seemed to explode on the screen, overwhelming my reservations. The poet-protagonist offered a bitter, realistic vision of politics – in flagrant contrast to the naïveté of his companions – as he resisted the recently imposed military dictatorship. The film stages the moment of the coup d’état as a nightmare he has at the moment of his death: a confusing spectacle evoking at once Buñuel’s *La fièvre monte à El Pao* (Republic of Sin), mixed with some of the bad habits of the New Wave and strokes of Fellini’s *8 ½*. But that chaos contributed to the parodic force of the film. And the effect was not entirely a disservice to the character, even though his desperate attempts at maintaining a critical perspective on his political objectives while sustaining the will to carry them out – the kind of dilemma that would lead so many to madness, mysticism, or the trenches of the opposition – lead, rather gratuitously, to his death. It is touching to think, today, how such a series of events might provide, with slight variations, a succinct biography of Glauber himself.

The film was naturally not a box-office success, but it scandalized the intellectuals and artists of the Carioca Left. Some in the audience – leaders of politically engaged theatre – jeered as the lights came up. One scene in particular shocked them: During a mass demonstration the poet, who is among those making speeches, calls forward a unionized worker and, to show how unprepared the worker is to fight for his rights, violently covers his mouth, shouting at the others (and at the audience), “This is the people! Idiots, illiterate, no politics!” Then a poor wretch, representing unorganized poverty, appears from among the crowd trying to speak, only to be silenced by the point of a gun stuck in his mouth by one of the candidate’s bodyguards. This indelible image is reiterated in long close-ups.

I experienced that scene – and the indignant, heated discussions that it provoked in bars – as the nucleus of a great event whose brief name I now possess but did not know then (I would try to name it a thousand ways for myself and for other people): the death of populism. There is no doubt that populist demagogues are sumptuously ridiculed in the film: they are seen holding crucifixes and flags in open cars against the sky above the Aterro do Flamengo, a wide modern road by the sea, lined with landscaped gardens. There they are in their gaudy mansions, celebrating the solemn rites of the church and Carnival that touch the heart of the masses, and so forth. But it was their essential faith in the popular forces – and the very respect that the best souls invested in the poor man – that here was discarded as a political weapon and an ethical value in itself. It was a hecatomb that I was facing. And I was excited by the prospect of examining what drove it and anticipating its consequences. Tropicalismo would have never have come into being but for that traumatic moment.

This assault on traditional left-wing populism liberated one to see Brazil squarely from a broader perspective, enabling new and undreamt-of critiques of an anthropological, mythic, mystical, formalist, and moral nature. If the scene of the poet and the worker that incensed the communists charmed me with its courage, it is because the images that came before and after it were trying to reveal something about our condition and ask questions about our destiny. A great cross on the beach overshadows a gathering of politicians, transvestites dressed to the nines for a ball, and Carnival Indians; one feels the presence of the grotesque and with it the revelation of an island always newly discovered and always hidden – Brazil. Among the multitude at the rally, a little old man is dancing samba, graceful and ridiculous, lecherous and angelic, happily lost – the Brazilian people captured in a paradox. One does not know whether they are meant to seem despairing or suggestive; political decisions are discussed on cement patios with black lines dividing the floor, asserting a denial of the comings and goings of the characters. The camera weaves among groups of four, five, six restless agitators, who express disagreement over tactics through their body language, all shot in black and white with enormous areas of light threatened by ominous, looming shadows. It was a political dramaturgy different from the usual reduction of everything to a stereotype of class struggle. Above all, here was the rhetoric and the poetics of post-1964 Brazilian life: a deep scream of pain and impotent rebellion, but also an updated vision, nearly prophetic, of our real possibilities to be and to feel.

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### **Andre Piucci says**

"Quando eu tinha 23 anos me aplicaram o teste de Rorachach, e o resultado, quanto a isso foi: homossexualismo latente, identificação feminina, idealização da figura da mulher."

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### **Georgia Kirilov says**

I've started this book 3 times before I finished it. Every time school would start and I would have to stop, when I could embark on it again I felt like I had to begin from the start cause the narrative has such free flow you feel like you've lost a part of the story. Well, now I'm sad it's over. This is one of the most mesmerizing accounts by one of my favorite human beings on earth of his experience as a Brazilian, as one of the creators of Tropicalia and as a human. Caetano's point in not researching before or fact checking the details is what makes this so special, this is what has stuck to his memory, to his soul and as you go along the book some things come back to him. This book feels like a friend telling you about an important time in their life, a friend that is well-read and mostly well-lived. It is a cultural encyclopedia of Brasil spanning many years and, of course, pertinent to his perspective of the accounts. The words used to describe people and feelings brought me to tears many many times, this is a book that I will revisit again and again, because it made me glad I am alive and it made me glad I am Brazilian in ways I did not know before.

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### **Alyx says**

I was blown away by tropicalia, a musical movement from Brazil that took hold in the late 60s, when I first encountered it as a college radio deejay. Subversive pop music by folks who know that to be a true Beatles fan, you have to love Yoko? Sold. If you aren't aware of Gilberto Gil and Os Mutantes, or peripheral players like Elis Regina, Jorge Ben, and predecessor João Gilberto, you can't go wrong with any of the available recordings (Ben's gracious *Tábua De Esmeralda* is one of my all-time favorite albums). As for Veloso, his

elegant, cerebral body of work speaks for itself. If you haven't been transported by "Quando seu lobo não vem" or his cameo in Talk to Her, I'll follow David Byrne's lead and strongly recommend it. His cover of "Billie Jean" is pretty good too.

Going in, I was hoping Veloso's autobiography would incorporate the cultivation of tropicalia as a left-of-the-Left movement into a discursive history of national identity, political factions, and broadcast television's influence on popular music. I'd love to read that book (I'd also like to read the book that explains how bossa nova rose to popularity in East Asian countries like Japan). However, Veloso weakens any insights around his upbringing, Brazil's racist history, miscegenation, exoticism, the movement's responses to and against American and European popular culture, censorship, tropicalia's political agenda, the 1964 coup, his and Gil's brief imprisonment, their exile in England, and more interesting concerns with tangents both insular and indulgent. He made a point not to research before writing this book, and I believe it to be a mistake. We get one man's opinions, which ultimately do little to validate or contextualize this important part of contemporary musical history.

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### **Patrícia Simões says**

Escrita um pouco confusa. Não fosse o meu grande interesse pelo tema, de certeza que não o teria lido até ao fim. Cheio de boas referências e histórias.

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### **Intortetor says**

un'autobiografia, un saggio sulla cultura popolare (musicale, ma anche letteraria e cinematografica) brasiliana e sulla società brasiliana e sulla situazione politica (una feroce dittatura militare) che i brasiliani vissero tra i '60 e i '70, e probabilmente anche altri tipi di libri ancora: aspettarsi da Caetano Veloso qualcosa di lineare e facilmente inquadrabile è inutile, la sua scrittura assorbe qualsiasi cosa esattamente come la sua musica per produrre qualcosa di magmatico e difficilmente inquadrabile. perfetto complemento al recente documentario "Tropicalia", che restituisce in immagini diverse parti del libro.

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### **Harold says**

Veloso is an intellect. That is obvious from reading this. My hunch is that he wrote the English version himself. In any event this is most likely the definitive book on Tropicalia. that he was jailed and deported for basically writing music that the right wing disapproved of is startling. Under a repressive regime it can happen anywhere.

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