BAM and World Music Institute present

Tom Zé

BAM Howard Gilman Opera House
Jun 3 at 8pm

Running time: approx. 70 mins, no intermission
Tom Zé vocals, guitar, special instruments, composition, and lyrics

Jarbas Mariz 12-string guitar, cavaquinho, percussion, and vocals

Cristina Carneiro keyboards and vocals

Daniel Maia electric guitar and vocals

Felipe Alves double bass and vocals

Rogério Bastos drums

This concert is presented as part of WMI’s Masters of Brazilian Music Series.
Zé was born in the small town of Irará, Bahia. He studied music at the University of Bahia and later relocated to São Paulo to begin his career. Along with Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil, Gal Costa, Os Mutantes, and Nara Leão, Zé contributed to the groundbreaking Tropicália album/manifesto *Tropicália: ou Panis et Circenses* (1968) and performed throughout Brazil. When the government began to crack down on the revolutionary Tropicália movement, Zé moved out of the spotlight and began to experiment with new compositional styles and novel instrumentation. He slipped out of the public eye in the 70s and 80s, until his pioneering work was rediscovered in the 90s. Zé’s music has been noted for its unorthodox approach to melody and instrumentation, including using everyday objects as musical instruments. His avant-garde compositions feature dissonance, unusual time signatures, and polytonality. Zé has toured worldwide, including appearances at MoMA, the Walker Art Center, Central Park Summerstage, the Barbican Festival, and Lincoln Center. Zé has composed for Brazilian contemporary dance company Grupo Corpo, and is the subject of three documentaries: *Tom Zé, or Who Will Put a Dynamite in the Head of the Century?* (2000); *Fabricating Tom Zé* (2006); and *Tom Zé–Liberated Astronaut* (2009). Zé is the author of three books: *Tropicalista Slow Struggle*, *Deserted Island–Discs*, and *Cities of Brazil–Salvador*. 
THE BAND
These musicians have been playing with Tom Zé for decades. The youngest of the group has performed for 10 years with the band. Their resumes include working with numerous bands and artists, combined with diverse academic backgrounds. This skilled group is able to adapt to the sudden changes and improvisations that Tom Zé may do at any point in a performance.

DANIEL MAIA, guitarist and vocals, is the producer of Tom Zé’s last four albums. He has been with the band for 11 years.

JARVAS MARIZ, vocals, percussion, Brazilian cavaquinho and 12-string guitar, has been a member of the band for 29 years.

CRISTINA CARNEIRO, keyboard and vocals, has been with the band for 20 years.

FELIPE ALVES, bass, is a 10-year veteran with the band.

ROGÉRIO BASTOS, drums, joined the band more than 20 years ago.

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE
Founded in 1985 as a not-for-profit, World Music Institute (WMI) has served as one of the leading presenters of world music and dance within the United States. WMI is committed to presenting the best in traditional and contemporary music and dance from around the world with the goal of inspiring wonder for the world’s rich cultural traditions, promoting awareness, and encouraging cross-cultural dialog and exchange. WMI presents at venues throughout the city and depends on public and private funding to accomplish its mission.

For more information on its programs and World Citizen membership program, please visit worldmusicinstitute.org
By Christopher Dunn

Like many artists who have pursued a radically inventive path in popular music, Tom Zé has experienced his share of ostracism and frustration mixed with occasional, hard-won moments of critical recognition and modest success. Yet two instances of good fortune had a decisive impact on his life and career. The first came in 1920, 16 years before he was born, when Zé’s father, a street vendor, won the federal lottery. With his prize, Zé’s father opened a fabric store and married into a family of local politicians and intellectuals in Irará, a small town in the dry scrublands, known as the sertão, in the state of Bahia. By 1936, when Tom came along, his family enjoyed a life of relative comfort in one of the poorest regions of Brazil. In Zé’s estimation, his father’s luck provided him and his four siblings access to protein and books, two commodities that were in short supply in the Brazilian hinterlands in the 1930s and 1940s. He ate meat with his rice and beans, learned how to read, listened to his uncles’ classical music records, and went off to study in Salvador, the state capital.

The second instance was not a case of sheer luck, like the lottery windfall, but rather a stroke of serendipity. In 1998, David Byrne was scouring the record stores of downtown Rio in search of material for a compilation of samba recordings for Luaka Bop, his recently founded label. He happened upon Zé’s *Estudando o Samba* (Studying the Samba), which had been misplaced in a bin of samba records, no doubt thanks to the title. Back in New York, he found something quite different—an edgy, vanguardist take on samba that seemed to have more in common with New York’s downtown music scene than with the modern samba of Rio’s north side. It had been recorded in 1975, around the time that Byrne formed Talking Heads.

When Byrne came across *Estudando o Samba*, Tom Zé was at the nadir of his career. Most of his records were out of print and he was surviving on local gigs for small audiences of university students, intellectuals, and fellow experimental musicians in São Paulo. At the time, he was contemplating a move back to Irará to work at a service station owned by one of his cousins. Within two years he was contracted as the first artist on the Luaka Bop label.

In 1990, when Luaka Bop issued *The Best of Tom Zé: Massive Hits*, comprised primarily of cuts from *Estudando o Samba*, Zé was not an obvious candidate for rehabilitation in Brazil. In the US and Europe, however, Tom Zé’s sudden appearance seemed like a small miracle in the way it defied all expectations of what Brazilian music should sound like. He had emerged from another culture, one equally modern and urban, yet with different musical sensibilities. Besides introducing Tom Zé to an international audience and reviving his career in Brazil, *Massive Hits* also led Zé to a creative renaissance in the studio and on stage. As a pop artist, he is something of an anomaly, having produced some of his best work after turning 55. At 80, he is at the top of his game and playing with the best band he has ever had.

To Brazilians, like Tom Zé, who grew up in a small underdeveloped town, the process of modernization was a startling existential experience. In recalling his childhood, Zé can describe the arrival of electricity and running water in Irará in vivid detail. In the 1940s, Irará was, as Zé says, a “pre-Gutenbergian” place, a world of oral communication and circular time marked by agricultural seasons and annual religious festivals.

Tom Zé grew up between two distinct, yet interconnected worlds: one that was “traditional,” reliant on oral communication, and mostly poor, and another that was “modern” and distinguished by literacy, access to new technologies, and the promise of upward mobility. Much of his artistic production over the past five decades is informed by the tension between these two realities.

In the early 1950s, a friend introduced him to the guitar and he soon found that music was an ideal form for chronicling the social and cultural life of Irará. He drew inspiration from backland cancionistas, itinerant musicians who traveled around the sertão, performing at markets and festivals. Telling stories, relating news, and providing humorous commentary were central to the work of the cancionistas, who performed for tips. They were an early inspiration for Tom Zé’s performance style, which still eschews the conventions of pop music shows in favor of free-wheeling improvisation with frequent interruptions, impromptu monologues, the occasional diatribe, and audience sing-alongs.
A typical Tom Zé show is part musical performance, part stand-up comedy, and part lecture on anything ranging from the history of counterpoint to the pitfalls of globalization. He likes to call his music *impressa cantada*—sung journalism. Heavy doses of social and political satire have permeated his songs ever since he began composing tongue-in-cheek ditties about life in Iraí. In his first televised performance, in 1960, the 26-year-old appeared on a talent show in Salvador called *Escada para o Sucesso* (The Stairway to Success) only to sing a ballad called “Rampa para o Fracasso” (The Ramp to Failure), revealing a penchant for irony and self-deprecation. This was the era of bossa nova, a cool distillation of samba, not particularly noted for its ironic or satiric sensibilities.

In 1962, Tom Zé began his musical studies at the Universidade da Bahia, in Salvador. The university was experiencing a renaissance under the visionary direction of Chancellor Edgar Santos, who was determined to turn Salvador, then a provincial backwater, into a world-class center for the arts, inviting Hans Joachim Koellreuter, a German proponent of 12-tone composition. Zé studied composition with the Swiss composer Ernst Widmer, who sought to open up the realm of “erudite” music to local Afro-Bahian musical traditions. He also began working with Swiss emigré, Walter Smetak, hired to teach cello but who spent most of his time in a basement workshop. There he invented new electro-acoustic instruments made with local materials, especially the calabash gourds typically used as resonators for *berimbau*, the one-string instrument of Angolan origin used in the dance/fight capoeira. It was a period of intense experimentation, when the rarified world of “art music” began to engage the local Afro-Brazilian musical practices.

Around the same time, Zé began composing music for the local branch of the CPC (Centro Popular de Cultura), closely associated with the Brazilian Communist Party. The CPC was charged with raising political consciousness among urban workers and rural peasants with the aim of building an anti-imperialist and socialist revolutionary movement. Inspired by the Cuban Revolution and emboldened by the leftward tack of Brazil’s populist president, João Goulart, left-wing artists and intellectuals joined forces with union leaders and peasant leagues with hopes of transforming Brazil. Zé came into contact with other young artists, like musicians Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso, and poets José Carlos Capinan and Torquato Neto. In 1964, he first performed with Gil and Veloso, along with Veloso’s younger sister Maria Bethânia and Gal Costa in a musical showcase. That year, a US-backed military coup ousted Goulart, quashed the labor movements, persecuted students, and abolished the CPC. This cohort of Bahian artists—*o grupo baiano*—would migrate south, to Rio and then São Paulo. Zé stayed in Salvador to finish his studies at the university, but at Veloso’s suggestion, he relocated to São Paulo in 1968.

São Paulo was the epicenter for Brazilian modernismo, a reinvention of literary and visual arts in the 1920s. Some 30 years later, it was the center for concretismo, a constructivist avant-garde in poetry and visual arts. By the 1960s, São Paulo had become a hub for media and culture industries, attracting musicians from Rio and beyond. The leading television station, TV Record, hosted annual televised music festivals in which musicians would enter songs into a formal competition and perform them before a live studio audience. The TV Record Festival became a stage for the cultivation of MPB, an acronym for Música Popular Brasileira, a designation for mid-1960s post-bossa nova popular music that was coded as both “national” and “modern.” MPB artists, competed with a nascent rock ‘n’ roll movement—*iê-iê-iê*—collectively known as the Jovem Guarda (Young Guard). The conflict between MPB artists and the Jovem Guarda was largely media-driven: TV Record aired Elis Regina’s weekly showcase for MPB, *O Fino da Bossa*, as well as Roberto Carlos’ program Jovem Guarda and had an interest in promoting this rivalry. There were also political implications: MPB artists were more apt to use popular music as a vehicle for social and political critique, including protest against the military regime, while *iê-iê-iê* was mostly about love dramas, fast cars, and youth style.

While clearly identified with MPB, *o grupo baiano*, especially Veloso and Gil, were enthralled with British and American rock and dreamed of revolutionizing Brazilian popular music. Both of them participated in the 1967 TV Record Festival—Veloso backed by an Argentine rock band and Gil backed by Os Mutantes, who would soon become one of the greatest psychedelic rock bands of all time. It was the
beginning of what was soon be called Tropicália (or Tropicalismo), a radical intervention in the field of MPB that cannibalized modern rock and pop, bossa nova, traditional sambas, and kitschy boleros. The tropicalistas worked intensively with Rogério Duprat, a member of Música Nova, a group of experimental composers allied with the concrete poets who were heirs to Koellreuter’s vanguard.

Veloso and Gil were the most visible faces of the tropicalist movement, but Zé brought an interest in formal experimentation and an acute sense of social and political satire. His song, “Parque Industrial,” which appeared on the collective concept album *Tropicália, ou Panis et Circensis*, lampooned the official discourse of industrial development, the promises of consumer capitalism, and the rise of the sensationalist press. His first solo album further developed this critique of urban life during a time of rapid modernization. The album was an oddball mixture of organ and electric guitar driven iê-iê-iê, experimental music, and traditional ballads of the northeastern cantadores. His solo effort was essentially a concept album about daily life in São Paulo—its pollution and traffic jams, its prostitutes and radio personalities, its bargain shops and smiling billboards.

The album introduced a recurring theme in Zé’s music, summed up in a phrase from his text: “We are an unhappy people bombarded by happiness.” Of all the tropicalistas, Tom Zé was most intrigued, but also the most wary, of the media-saturated consumer-driven industrial society of São Paulo. While Tropicália songs by Gil and Veloso celebrated opportunities for becoming “consumer-citizens” in a mega-city with countless attractions, Zé’s songs often reminded listeners of deep class inequalities and forms of social exclusion in the sprawling metropolis. For Zé, the promise of happiness in consumer society could be deceptive and even oppressive. For decades, Zé was all but written out of the history of the Tropicália movement, which focused on Veloso, Gil, and Costa, who would become superstars in the following decade. This has changed in recent years with new scholarship on the movement and several excellent documentaries about Tom Zé, such as Decio Matos’ *Fabricando Tom Zé* (2006) and Igors Iglesias’ *Tom Zé: Astronauta Libertado* (2009). Still today, there is debate around Tom Zé’s place in Tropicália, with some arguing that his musical project was distinct, having diverged so radically from mainstream MPB. Others regard Zé as the musician who most faithfully carried on in the vanguardist spirit of the movement. It’s a question of emphasis: Was Tropicália ultimately about opening up Brazilian popular music to the electric guitar and various forms of international pop? Or was it about permanent experimentation informed by the musical avant-garde? Or was it more complicated? Tom Zé recorded his share of radio-friendly pop songs, like the now-forgotten “Jeitinho dela” (1970), while Veloso recorded *Araça Azul* (1972), perhaps the most explicitly vanguardist album in the history of Brazilian popular music. These lingering questions are a testament to the ambiguity of Tropicália, which was based on the dual imperatives of formal experimentation and pop viability.

Christopher Dunn teaches Brazilian literature and culture at Tulane University and is author of Brutality Garden: Tropicália and the Emergence of a Brazilian Counterculture (UNC Press).

Courtesy of Luaka Bop.

(This article is excerpted from a longer piece by Christopher Dunn.)
TROPICÁLIA, VACUUMS & CAREER REBIRTH
THE STORY OF TOM ZÉ
BY NATHAN GELGUD
Tom Zé is from a poor area in Bahia, Brazil, but was able to study music at the Federal University of Bahia.

His father had won the lottery years earlier, and allocated the money wisely.

Zé came onto the scene while associated with the Tropicália movement, contributing to the 1968 compilation album “Tropicália.” His song “Parque Industrial” put the Brazilian national anthem alongside ad jingles.
Typical for Zé, he went his own way as the movement grew.

I did what I did, but I wasn’t part of [Tropicália] when it started to become serious.

Zé’s first three solo albums were:

- Grande Liquidação 1968
- Tom Zé 1970
- Se o Caso É Chorar 1973

Zé was determined to push boundaries; “Todos os olhos” (1973) was his fourth album, more experimental and challenging than his previous albums. It was also a critical and commercial failure.

I don’t make music, I make spoken and sung journalism.
By the late 1970s, Zé was using household appliances, playing an instrument that triggered blenders and vacuum cleaners with a keyboard made of doorbells.

His audience continued to shrink.

Zé stopped recording in the 1980s, and was ready to go back to working at the family gas station, when in 1989 he heard that David Byrne was looking for him.
By Farah Haidari

Tom Zé is often labeled a “cultural cannibal,” but far from just a fitting nickname for a controversial man, the phrase transcends any one Tropicália musician. Part creative descriptor, part radicalizing mantra, antropofagia (cultural cannibalism) presents an intersection of art and social justice in which Brazilian artists have proven their unique position in socio-political change—finding answers in the avant-garde when others cannot.

Before its use in Tropicália, cultural cannibalism was made famous by Brazilian modernist poet and political agitator Oswald de Andrade in his 1928 Manifesto Antropófago (translated to “Cannibalist Manifesto”). Originally published in a São Paulo cultural review, the vehemently anti-colonialist poem is a manifesto for newly post-colonial society. It rejects its colonizers’ assumed superiority, referring to them as “this plague of a supposedly cultured and Christianized peoples” and offering a counter-narrative: “those who came here weren’t crusaders. They were fugitives from a civilization we are eating.” The poem’s mere notion of a glorified, morally superior cannibalism implicitly refuses colonialist hierarchies of civilization—subverting the imperial Western distinction between “civilized” and “savage.”

Andrade’s counter-narrative further challenges views of Brazilian identity as necessarily contingent on colonizers, problematizing assumptions about cultural derivation with its alternate, self-determined way of forming identity. By synthesizing oppressors’ strengths into a native self, Andrade’s metaphorical cannibal becomes something original amid a colonial reality—all while maintaining a sense of self-ownership. Through this radical conceptualization of Brazil’s plight, Andrade paints a brand new national self-portrait with an illuminated way forward: “Absorption of the sacred enemy. To transform him into a totem.”
This call for consumption was picked up by Tropicália trailblazer Caetano Veloso in 1967, as Brazilian artists saw creative suppression at the hands of a military dictatorship. The postcolonial society’s insecurity amid escalating globalization made for fraught cross-cultural exchange. Fearing Western indoctrination, draconian leadership assumed hyper-nationalistic hostility toward foreign influence. Authorities barricaded, but Veloso disagreed: “I am only interested in the kind of resistance that’s natural, not a programmed one.” Veloso found American influence unavoidable and critiqued the regime’s nationalism as “naive and defensive.” Instead, he advocated a more engaged and aggressive identity—one that confers autonomy through unfettered consumption.

The pioneering artist interprets Andrade’s 1920s notions: “You take in anything and everything, coming from anywhere and everywhere, and then you do whatever you like with it; you digest it as you wish: you eat everything there is and then produce something new.” By championing this view, Veloso and peers found a framework in antropofagia for processing Western culture. Whereas Brazilian authorities said “keep it out,” Tropicalistas responded “devour it.”

Their resulting assimilation of American rock ‘n’ roll and pop trends into samba and bossa nova endangered nationalism, causing offense across the political spectrum. Even students observing what Veloso calls “a kind of socialist populism” famously revolted when Tropícália band Os Mutantes, pioneer Gilberto Gil, and Veloso took the stage at 1968’s Festival Internacional da Canção. Through screams and thrown objects (including a piece of wood that hit Gil in the leg), the musicians performed “É Proibido Proibir” (it’s forbidden to forbid).

Despite backlash, Veloso maintains that even the Brazilian nationalists’ beloved bossa nova evolved from foreign influence, digesting the best of American music into a native form: “With tropicalismo we wanted to remind people that bossa nova had done a certain kind of cultural violence in order to revitalize popular music. But memory is short for such things…”

Tropicália’s disruption lasted hardly a year before military took action, imprisoning and then exiling Veloso and Gil after the two parodied Brazil’s national anthem on television in December 1968. And though the movement ended, resistance continued when in 1973, a young Tom Zé decided his album art for the experimental Todos os Olhos (“All Eyes”): a close-up photo of a marble stuck in an asshole—what David Byrne summarizes as “a ‘fuck-you’ to the dictatorship.”

For a movement he says is about “freedom and innovation on an aesthetic and behavioral level,” Zé’s unique brand of irreverence highlights the power in Tropicália’s indiscriminate, voracious attack on culture, weaponizing madness to fly in the face of Western supremacy and native dictators alike. A fitting literary supplement for Zé’s antropofagia, then, might be another Oswald de Andrade poem titled “Armor.” The text? Simply: “Humor.”

Farah Haidari is a copywriter at BAM.