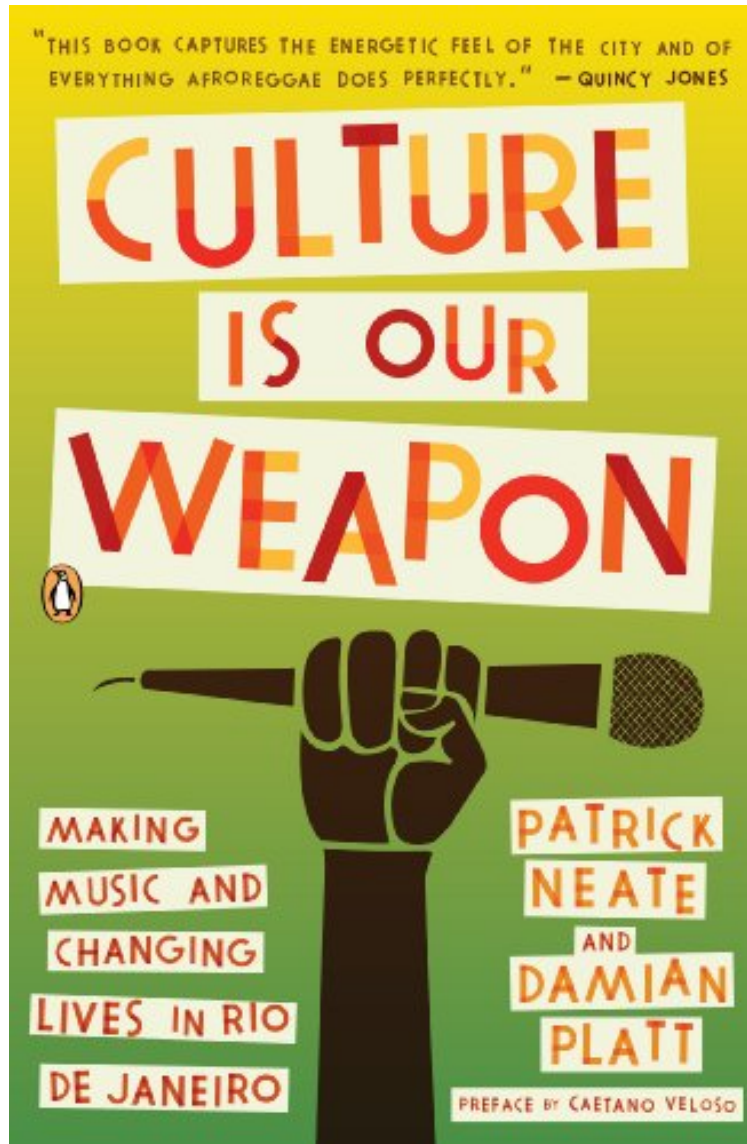


Culture Is Our Weapon: Making Music and Changing Lives in Rio de Janeiro

Patrick Neate, Damian Platt

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Patrick Neate, Damian Platt : Culture Is Our Weapon: Making Music and Changing Lives in Rio de Janeiro before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Culture Is Our Weapon: Making Music and Changing Lives in Rio de Janeiro:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Book of hope By MeIt was good to read a book about people making a real difference for the people of the favelas. Much luck to AfroReggae. 0 of 0 people found the following review

helpful. AfroReggae - The nucleus of changeBy R. RodriguezThe importance of the arts could not be better advocated than this compelling story woven with the bitter reality that exists in the poor neighborhoods of Rio de Janeiro. The reader is given a clear background of the conditions, both current and the necessary historical context, to explain how the gripping sounds of AfroReggae is succeeding in reaching across ethnic, racial, and class barriers in Brazil. This promising success story is an interesting book for music enthusiasts, visitors of this area of Brazil, non-profit organizations, and those believing in the power of the arts, particularly music, to enable positive change in communities whether affluent or poor. One improvement to suggest is a glossary of terms be added to the back of the book to help those that take a more leisurely time in their reading. All terms needing explanation are given clearly at the bottom of each page, but this can be cumbersome to look for if coming back to the book after several days.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Excellent readBy jmkI read Neate's "Where You're At..." a few years ago, and thought it was great. As a music lover and working professional in the music industry I found it to be an informative read with insight into pop culture around the world, and of course Hip Hop. I came across this book while browsing the Kindle store and knew I wouldn't be disappointed with it, having read Neate's work before. Just like "Where You're At" Neate provides the reader with enough information and history to stay relevant and interested. There was a lot of new information to me, but I never felt like I was reading a high school history book. I found this a great educational and eye opening read. If you're a fan of his work, I'm sure you'll enjoy this also. Or for anyone interested in culture and ethnic studies give this a shot.

An inspiring mission to rescue young people from drugs and violence with music At a time when interest in Brazilian culture has reached an all-time high, and the stories of one person's ability to improve the lives of others has captured so many hearts, this unique book takes readers to the frontlines of a battle raging over control of the nation's poorest areas. Culture Is Our Weapon tells the story of Grupo Cultural AfroReggae, a Rio-based organization employing music and an appreciation for black culture to inspire residents of the favelas, or shantytowns, to resist the drugs that are ruining their neighborhoods. This is an inspiring look at an artistic explosion and the best and worst of Brazilian society.

"Examines the music and cultural tumult of the Brazilian favelas with a clear eye. ... Neate and Platt bring a deeply curious outsider's perspective to Rio, and the book moves easily from cocktails on elite balconies to government offices to the dangerous favela streets. ... [They] tackle complex political issues without it ever feeling like they're delivering a lecture, partly because they weave in the voices of people involved." -Los Angeles Times "What makes the AfroReggae story compelling is the blend of idealism and realism that Jose Junior, the founder, must have to work in his environment: the idealist view that culture can actually provide the first rung or two on a ladder that will help kids escape the violence and poverty of these slums, and the realistic assessment of what needs to be done to make that happen." -John Schaefer, WNYC Music Hub "The stories depicted here are suspenseful and horrifying, but more importantly, inspirational, as one group strives to bring peace to what is otherwise a war zone." -Weekly Dig (Boston) "Neate and Platt do an excellent job of capturing the captivating energy and many conflicting emotions of the favela communities through first-person accounts." -Daily Texan "As the book weaves through both the culturally rich and violent realities of Brazil, the reader in turn oscillates between admiration and absolute horror. ... [Culture Is Our Weapon] offers a rich background on the corrupt, political reality in the country-it explores the way in which music in general has played a role in Brazilian's lives and delves into the individual lives of favela residents, giving a unique perspective on the way social classes function." -Columbia Spectator "Platt and Neate ask people internationally to think about the images and stories we hear about Brazil, not just the poverty and oppression, but the stories that are often hidden beneath the surface. Those stories are of the social revolutions that the people of these communities are creating, and the ways they are finding success." -Daily Vanguard "The work of AfroReggae of changing a community through the arts is inspirational. ... When I finished this book there is no doubt in my mind that the arts can save a community." -Reading in Color "An inspiring book about the good things happening through Grupo Cultural AfreReggae. ... [A] tale of the people of Rio and the power of music to celebrate ethnic diversity, level social inequality, and provide hope for the oppressed community." -Mom Most TraveledAbout the AuthorPatrick Neate is the author of the National Book Critics Circle Award winner Where You're At, as well as four novels. Damian Platt lives in Rio de Janeiro and works with AfroReggae. Caetano Veloso is a musician, writer, and political activist.Excerpt. copy; Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.I am not from Rio de Janeiro originally but a from small town in Bahia, so I remember how, as a kid, we all used to look to this city for inspiration. It was, of course, the capital during the Empire and then the Republic, but it was also the cultural capital of Brazil. I remember going to the cinema in the 1950s and the images wersquo;d see of the city: Copacabana beach, Sugarloaf, Christ the Redeemer, samba and Carnival. And, of course, the favelas.It may seem hard to believe now but, traditionally, Rio is a city that has been proud of its favelas and all the cultural expressions that have emerged from them. Satilde;o Paulo, for example, is different: the poor areas are a long way from the centre, so rich and poor donrsquo;t feel like they belong to the same town. But in Rio, many favelas are at the heart of the city and theyrsquo;ve always been a source of pride

for the whole population. In my teens, I remember sambas praising the particular beauty and happiness of favela life and later, in the 1970s, I often used to visit favelas like Mangueira myself. Even now, you'll find the richest and most chic families joining the samba parades because they're Cariocas¹ and they love to celebrate the culture. But these days something has changed. Historically, the basic difficulty facing Brazil has always been the enormous disparity of wealth between rich and poor. All things considered Brazil is a very convivial country but this huge poverty gap is an invitation to violence. Now add drug trafficking to that situation and see what happens. I'm not an expert but I guess it began in the early 1980s: people in the favelas began to deal cocaine and suddenly some of the poorest people became very rich and powerful. Suddenly they were dealing with large amounts of money and they were able to buy weapons, police, politicians, judges and lawyers. Of course, the irony is that it never secures these people a bourgeois lifestyle. They may be rich and powerful but they can't leave the favelas for fear of their lives, and they usually die young. This is the reality. In the past, even the criminals in the favela were seen as somehow charming. I recorded a version of the song 'Charles Anjo' and, with the benefit of hindsight, I can see that this song is a landmark, a turning point. By the time we recorded 'Charles Anjo', he was already a character that was saluted with gunshots. You see, Jorge Ben (who wrote the song) is from Tijuca and that was precisely the kind of place where this new kind of criminality was beginning to spring up. It is true that, even now, the gangsters in Rio have some kind of charm, but the levels of violence and fear have changed beyond recognition because of the drug trade. These days, I'm sorry to say, people are afraid and the face of the city has been transformed. Look at the way all the buildings in Zona Sul are guarded by barriers, security devices and armored cars. This situation of fear and violence is the one in which AfroReggae do their work. I first came across AfroReggae when they were just kids playing percussion. I can't remember exactly when it was nor who invited me, but I know it was 1993, because it was just after the police massacred 21 civilians in Vigacuterie;rio Geral and I knew this group had been put together in response to that horror. I saw them perform in a hotel not far from Ipanema and, on that first occasion, I was simply impressed by their innocence. At the time, they were just kids imitating percussion groups from Bahia; that's what they did at the very beginning, and that's how I got to know them. Later, I discovered that it was Junior whosquod put them together and that hersquod done other work in these poor communities, including the newspaper AfroReggae Noticias. So I kept my eye on them and we began to interact and a little later they asked me to be their official godfather, with the actress Regina Caseacute; as their godmother. Over the years, I have seen the progress of AfroReggae, and their development has been unbelievable. They have worked incredibly hard and are very serious about what they do, but they also work joyfully. I don't know much about the work of other NGOs, but I do know about music and they do it incredibly well. There is still a lot of fabulous music coming from the favelas: samba, of course, but now funk and hip hop too. AfroReggae are closest to hip hop but they mix it with other things that other groups don't. It's not fusion; rather they put different styles side by side and create contrasts. I admire the way they compose their music, creating cuts and edits as in a movie. It's beautiful and very modern. I believe AfroReggae are unique and I'm proud to be associated with them. To be honest, even if their ideology was wrong and they were not about helping people any more, they'd still be interesting because they're an important band. But AfroReggae are about helping people. As I got to know them, so I got to know their community. They took me to Vigacuterie;rio Geral and I learned a lot about the environment in which they work, and the war culture that is nurtured by the drug trade. I have seen for myself very young children handling heavy weapons and it's still unbelievable to me. But AfroReggae? These guys teach younger children how to play and, in doing so, they keep them out of the trafficking. They have built houses of culture and music right in the middle of all this violence. There are not many reasons to be optimistic in Rio right now. It is a complex situation in which violence and fear are on the rise and nobody seems to have a solution. But even amidst all these difficulties you can find some examples of beauty and excellence that give us all hope. This is what AfroReggae represent.

Caetano Veloso Rio De Janeiro, November 2005
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