

Approaches to the history of cinema in the music documentary

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Cinema, television and other audio-visual media have played a crucial role in the diffusion of popular music all over the twentieth century. For this reason, music documentaries often provide not only a visual exploration of the history of a particular style, band or singer, but also a musical trip through different audio-visual formats, that may include feature films, documentaries, music videos, TV performances, recorded live shows, newsreels and interviews. In this paper I would like to explore the relationship between the music documentary and the historiography of cinema by considering two examples from different countries: Martin Scorsese's exploration of the early career of Bob Dylan in *No Direction Home* (2005) and Lírio Ferreira and Hilton Lacerda's portrait of the Brazilian samba singer Cartola in *Cartola – Music for the Eyes* (2007). Both films deal with artists who are strongly connected with the roots of popular music and that somehow represent a particular national identity, both with their songs and with their public image. For this reason, the exploration of their lives and music is also an analysis of the ways audio-visual media have portrayed their music styles and their public personas.

Scorsese's film is divided into two sections: while the first deals with the formation years of Dylan up until his consolidation as a protest singer in the Newport Folk Festival in 1963, the second depicts his unease with this iconic image until his motorcycle accident in 1966, which he used to escape from the public eye. These two phases allow Scorsese to show the ways folk music was registered and broadcasted both before Dylan and in his own times, and the conflict between the individual and the mass media when he became a celebrity. On the other hand, *Cartola – Music for the Eyes* is also divided into two different parts, concealing his moving image in the first and showing it plentifully in the second. This division matches two different times in the public acknowledgement of black samba songwriters like Cartola: first, the periphery of industry, when they just wrote lyrics which were recorded by white singers; afterwards, their late homage as truly artists.

Being biopics about national icons, both *No Direction Home* and *Cartola – Music for the Eyes* go beyond the portrait of a particular character and become reflections on the relationship between music, images and public life in a particular geographical context. The history of cinema is obviously part of this process. *No Direction Home* includes, among others, *Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955), Warhol's *Screen Test* of Dylan (1965) and the music documentary *Dont Look Back* (D. A. Pennebaker, 1967). *Cartola – Music for the Eyes* shows images of popular comedies, political films such as *Entranced Earth* (Glauber Rocha, 1967) and numerous TV performances. In both cases, music establishes a possible line to build personal journeys through American or Brazilian movies and television. Both films are examples of how music documentaries allow the filmmakers to explore a particular strand of the history of images.

Key words

Music documentary, Bob Dylan, Cartola, historiography of cinema, archival footage.

Bio

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