

## ELIS REGINA'S TRAJECTORY IN BRAZILIAN MUSIC

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Marcia Vorpapel Serschon

Michel Alves da Cruz

#### Summary

Elis Regina had a very short and very productive career, being considered to this day, more than 35 years after her death, one of the greatest Brazilian singers. She lived in a troubled time for artists, under a military dictatorship, in which it was very difficult to position herself and achieve the continuity of her work, in an impartial way. Owner of a strong personality, she was notable as a defender of the artistic class and women's rights. Her trajectory in Brazilian music is the object of this article, which addresses both her technical and scenic development and her maturation from the point of view of behavior and relationship with the media and politics.

**Key words:** Elis Regina. Music. Trajectory.

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Elis Regina had a very short and very productive career, being considered today, more than 35 years after her death, one of the greatest Brazilian singers. He lived in a troubled time for artists, of military dictatorship, in which it was very difficult to position himself and to continue his work, in an impartial way. Owner of a strong personality, she was remarkable as a defender of the artistic class and women's rights. His trajectory in Brazilian music is the object of this article that addresses both his technical and scenic development and his maturity from the point of view of behavior and relationship with the media and politics.

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#### 1. Introduction

Elis Regina left us in 1982 at the age of 36, very young and with an impressive legacy, as well as three very talented children. A very short but very productive career, Elis Regina's work is well known throughout the world and is a calling card of Brazilian music. Having lived through a very turbulent period for the organization

Brazilian politics, that of the military dictatorship, has always been grappling with issues such as censorship, suspicions on the part of police bodies and even accusations of association of its image with the propaganda practices of the military government.

These were difficult times, which did not harm and perhaps even worked as a motivator for the productivity and quality of the work produced by the artist during this period. The theme/object of this article is Elis Regina's trajectory in Brazilian music, with the aim of addressing the following question: to what extent did the political and social scenario of the time interfere in Elis Regina's trajectory?

To this end, the approach method is the analysis of the trajectory based on available materials, covering books, articles and discography and the expected result is to obtain a vision, considering the historical context, of the influence exercised and suffered by Elis Regina.

## **2 Theoretical foundation**

### 2.1 Elis Regina in numbers

Between 1961 and 1980 Elis Regina recorded 18 albums in the studio, in some cases more than one album per year, which in itself is an impressive production. There were six more albums recorded at live shows. In the same period, the singer also recorded 23 singles, plus 10 double albums, in addition to 9 other releases. Posthumously, 6 more albums were released until 2012. A number that shows Elis Regina's great popularity is the number of songs and soap operas in miniseries: an impressive 54 occurrences (until 2017). All of this produced in less than 20 years of career.

### 2.2 Trajectory

The theme of analyzing an individual's trajectory considers factors that go beyond his or her biography, as it is concerned with placing the agent in the context of society at the time, in his group, in different social fields.

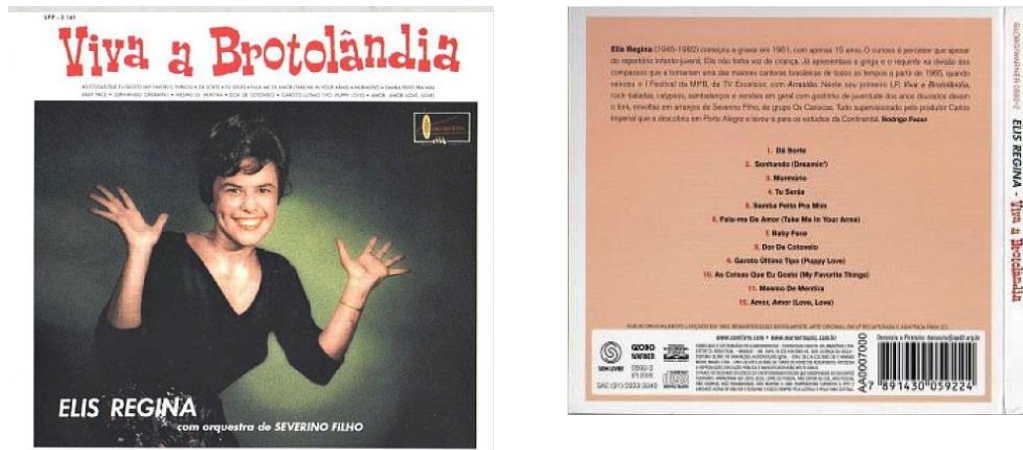
Bourdieu (1988) suggests that relationships of "influence and subordination" be drawn within a power structure, demarcating relative intellectual autonomies. Additionally, when analyzing the social relations in which the different subjects are inserted, it is possible to identify the need to highlight conflict games through

power, among the agents involved. Therefore, according to Bourdieu, the concept of “trajectory” would denote the objectification of relationships between agents, also considering their strengths in the field and seeking to describe the positions occupied simultaneously in these fields of activity, representing the trajectory, in this way, performance and relevance in the social space.

Elis Regina is considered by many to be the greatest Brazilian singer of all time (ECHEVERRIA, 1985, p.267). This is due to the conjunction of some factors such as the masterful integration of technique and vocal expression, with scenic body control and a complete stage performance (ACCIOLI, 1995, p.150). There are countless testimonies about the singer's technical-musical qualities. According to Rangel (1995, p.133-134): “What's different about Elis' interpretation is that, even when she sang old classics, she always renewed thanks to the permanent restlessness of her intelligence, not just technical resources, but also her insurmountable rhythmic division”. However, Elis Regina's maturity in music is fundamentally associated with her corporeality, and is the result of a long artistic trajectory that demonstrates her evolution as a complete stage artist. Even though she started her career on the radio, her entire career was based on music. way in which the visual image of your artistic product would reach your audience.

The singer's career began at the age of 11, when she sang at Clube do Guri on Rádio Farroupilha, where she received small fees and remained until she was 13 years old, when she signed a contract with Rádio Gaúcha from the age of 14. At the age of 16, she arrived in São Paulo to record her first compact, which contained the songs “Dá sorte” and “Sonhando” (ARASHIRO, 1995, p.41-42). Soon after, her record label released “Viva a Brotolândia” (1961), which brings a change in Elis Regina's voice, going from the big romantic voice common in the previous decade to a more youthful voice, striking in the 1960s. the movement of the hands and the characteristic smile are present (KUKOJ, 2008, p.9).

Figure 1 – Cover and back cover of the album “Viva a Brotolândia” from 1961



Source: Brazilian Musical Memory Institute (IMMuB)<sup>1</sup>

Elis Regina developed a very intense corporeality on stage. The gesture, considered exaggerated at first, was remarkable when she won the 1st National Festival of Brazilian Popular Music with Arrastão by Edu Lobo and Vinícius de Moraes (Folhetim, 1995, p.92). It took some time for her to balance so much energy and find the sweet spot.

When analyzing the maturation of her performance on stage, with the integration of corporality into her vocal technique and expression, combining planning and intuition, Elis reported to Silvio Lancellotti in 1972:

In fact, I want to learn some things. Body expression, for example. When I started my career, you remember, I moved my arms so much that I soon got the nickname 'Eliscóptero'. Afterwards, I started to receive so much criticism for my, let's say, excessive movement, that I practically tied my hands behind my waist. She sang so hard, so rigid, that a show was a real anguish. I had terrible pain in the muscles of my arms and back. Nowadays I'm behaving more thoughtfully. But I think it's very important to learn to post myself in a truly aesthetic way. In any case, I really believe in my instinct. And I don't want to inhibit it. There is no doubt that I have perfected my vocal technique, that I have developed my diction. At the same time, however, I do not wish to curtail what is natural to me, exactly what made me a singer" (LANCELLOTTI, 1995, p.79-80).

Elis Regina continued to follow her intuition and determination, taking advantage of every opportunity to invest in perfecting her art, receiving great influence from the North American dancer Lennie Dale, with whom she became a great friend (MARIANO, 2009). Her critical stance towards the massification provided by television created an ambiguous relationship between the artist and this medium, as it generated moments considered very remarkable and an antagonistic position when understanding that TV reduced the artist to a "copycat".

<sup>1</sup> The Instituto Memória Musical Brasileira (IMMuB), founded in 2006, is a non-profit organization based in Niterói – RJ that focuses on the research, preservation and promotion of Brazilian Popular Music.

or "draft", as recorded in an interview given on RBS (Rede Brasil Sul de Comunicação) on September 18, 1981, about the expressive limitations of artists on TV:

I think it needs [to be on TV]... but I ask you, honestly, do you think the general public knows Fernanda Montenegro?... they see the image, but they still don't know it... it's a lot less... she doesn't have the slightest possibility of releasing all of her drama, all of her actress's density... from the moment you... join this thing, this crazy-making machine, you stop being a person and it becomes an impulse... they are lines, they are figures that move... a mockery... a sketch of who you are as a person [...] (REGINA, BUENO, URBIM; SALDANHA, 2011).

The conflict between not liking television and, at the same time, needing it as a means of communication, caused a lot of professional problems for Elis, who went through some phases of distancing and getting closer to this medium.

Extrapolating the borders of Brazil, in the 1970s, Elis was already well known in Europe (McGOWAN; PESSANHA, 1991, p.85). Shortly after the release of her LP "Ela", in 1971, in 1972 she received a 50-minute special from German TV Südwestfunks in partnership with TV Globo, a program filmed in studio and in color, featuring several music clips (with arrangements by Herman Shoonderwalt) combined with staged texts (REGINA, LEGRAND, BLANCO, HOOR; BERGHOFF, 1972).

In this program one can observe a great emphasis on the scenic aspect, with very elaborate sets and costumes, which follow the theme of the music and have special effects, such as superpositions of moving images and still images, aerial shots with a crane, insertion of excerpts of letters in collages and moving signs, and other avant-garde graphic resources at the time. Elis sings in Portuguese, English, French and German. Regarding her involvement in politics, Elis Regina was associated with the two poles that existed at the time. One of the questions that arises about her trajectory is to what extent did the political and social scenario of the time interfere in Elis Regina's trajectory? She was not always involved with left-wing political engagement in her musical career, which occurred later, in her maturity. However, she was also accused of being right-wing by the singers of the protest songs, mainly due to the fact that "she sang the National Anthem at the Army Olympics in 1972 and, as a conductor, led a bunch of singers, in conductor's tailcoats, in an Army propaganda Brazilian on TV" (HENFIL, cited by ECHEVERRIA, 1985, p.191). In the same year, due to this episode, Elis' popularity began to decline, she was rejected by the newspaper O Pasquim and started to be booed at shows. In

1973, at a festival where the public received her with great coldness and disregard, Caetano Veloso shouted a phrase that would go down in history: "Respect the greatest singer on this earth".

A few months after this episode, Elis decided to spend some time in Los Angeles and recorded the anthological album *Elis* there. *It is* Tom, alongside Tom Jobim. To this day, this is considered one of the best albums of Brazilian music.

Her popularity grew again and she decided to launch a great show – which mixed music, theater and circus – entitled "Falso Brilhante". The idea was to tell her own life story on stage. The success was absolute and, in 1976, she released an album of the same name, a time when she broke with the recording industry because she wanted to have more creative freedom and wanted to bet on unknown composers, which she in fact did. The success of the songs *Como Nosso Pais* (track by Falso Brilhante) and *Romaria* (from the 1977 album *Elis*) boosted the careers of Belchior and Renato Teixeira respectively. Another name that gained exposure and recognition thanks to Elis was Milton Nascimento.

This was a very striking feature in the singer's career: having the same naturalness when moving between the cream of music and little-known artists – giving visibility and prestige to this second group.

As a result, Elis Regina suffered from the effects of an ideological patrol on her image in the media, which caused visible transformations towards a growing engagement in the choice of repertoire, in the construction of characters, in stage posture, in public statements (HENFIL, 1995, p.132).

In 1979, the singer definitely made peace with the left. In 1972, cartoonist Henfil had been responsible for the very harsh criticism addressed to her in *Pasquim*, but Elis decided to positively surprise him seven years later. Through the song *O Bêbado e a Equilibrista*, the singer paid tribute to several political exiles, including the sociologist Betinho, who was Henfil's brother. *O Bêbado e a Equilibrista*, composed by João Bosco and Aldir Blanc, became an amnesty anthem at that time. Later, Elis also gained prominence in defending women's rights. In the video of her last TV performance, on December 31, 1981, in addition to confirming her perfect balance between vocal technique and scenic performance, she expresses her position in relation to the autonomy of using the female body. When interpreting Armando Manzanero's song "Me Leaves Crazy", she can be seen as a spokesperson for women's sexual liberation, scenically illustrating the entire song as if it were a sexual act, with sensual vocal effects (ARASHIRO, 1995, p.58). In the early 1980s, Elis began to overindulge in alcohol and also consume cocaine. This troubled phase meant that his second marriage

also come to an end. In January 1982, acidic and confrontational as always, she gave her last interview. It was on the program *Jogo da Verdade*, on TV Cultura. Mauricio Kubrusly was one of the journalists to interview her at the time. She died on January 19, 1982, due to an overdose, at the age of 36.

### **Final considerations**

The biggest obstacles faced by Elis Regina throughout her career to build her scenic-musical identity in front of her audience originated when her record company, at the beginning of her career, imposed on her a stereotype of *Jovem Guarda* and the ideological patrols that associated it to the military regime.

However, these obstacles ended up motivating her to mature and redirect her preferences in choosing her repertoire and engaging in social causes, defending the less favored, workers, the politically oppressed, freedom of expression and women's rights.

He suffered important influences, such as the North American Broadway artist Lennie Dale, who was his main influence in the disciplined construction of planned and integrated gestures (music-text-body expression). At the height of her career, she sought out theater and dance professionals to direct her shows, which became a reference in the country not only for their aesthetic sense, but for the cohesion and vigor with which they communicated the artist's ideas.

In addition to developing her technical qualities as a singer, Elis Regina developed the ability to occupy the scenic space as a performer and use all the stage's resources in favor of her musical interpretation. Her career developed at the same time as the development of television, a fact that ended up causing several conflicts between the professional need to convey one's image on TV and the exercise of criticism of the facets of consumerism and alienation generally associated with this means of communication.

The artist was able to impressively balance refined vocal technique and emotion, and knew how to deal with the fact of being the highest paid artist on TV and at the same time defending the artistic class. She was a "genuinely brilliant", complete artist on stage, unanimous among the public, colleagues and producers of Brazilian music.

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