

My friend Baden Powell

I don't know what can be the effects (or not) on a square of this Brazilian with such a Britain name. Baden Powell is small, very thin; his face is "pale milk coffee", with a fine-featured (but virile) face, loaded with life, intelligence, generosity, and also with this insatiable curiosity of the greatest musicians. His eyes can be so intense, almost frightening, and the following minute express like an angelic gentleness.

He hardly speaks, and in his hotel room as in his home, or at friends', he listens to music -one could say absorb- most of the time.

What music? Every music!

I saw him listen to Arab or Indian music with avidity, African music, hazan songs, Jewish cantor, old or modern classical music, jazz, every kind of brazilian music, his music included. I believe mostly that, as honest man, or simply as man, Baden Powell must have some fascination power. This fascination being as great as his interlocutor is gifted.

On an artist BP instantly triggers this marvelous receptiveness that leads a human being to propose his friendship without conditions to someone who's up to. I'm sure that a musician has immediately the desire to communicate with him, even if (nonsense), this musician may never have hear him or his music.

When someone knows some of pieces that this genius guitarist recorded, or after hearing him play, one feels such a shock, and a crazy joy to meet him. And Baden Powell himself is delighted to meet people (of whatever race, language, religion or country) who swing and who love his music, or better the music.

As I don't speak Portuguese, I always talked with him in French, as when I spoke in English with Teresa, his wife, a beautiful Brazilian woman with far Dutch origins.

Teresa is the ideal kind of wife for any musician: she loves music, she seems to love her husband also, being very dedicated to him without being intrusive, she always stands behind him (but she knows well that she's not going unnoticed), she knows how to make him reasonable when he doesn't care for his health anymore, she also knows how to give him courage in every circumstance. As told me a charming colored American woman: "A wife must always be in the corner (of the ring) for her man, give him a tip to knock out the other, and send him to the fight stronger than ever!"

One day I caught him listening Brems "Concerto de Aranjuez" recording. I realized instantly, that this was the best interpretation of this piece. But I didn't dare to mention it.

Then I asked him if this recording wasn't one of the best rendering of this famous piece by Rodrigo. „It is by far the best recording, the Brazilian guitarist answered, because he plays every single note, not only perfectly, but also he plays them with his heart".

This is all Baden. He plays everything he improvises, composes, or interprets, in this very manner. Another day, Baden was listening at my home, the tapes from the Barclay's LP he's just been releasing with Ivan Jullien's arrangements. The intensity of his glance, the expression in his face, his concentration, made him look sculptural, hieratic. From time to time, he was looking with apprehension at Ivan and Johnny Griffin -who was also there-, me and our wives, and then reassured by our delighted faces, he would keep on listening avidly. The same day, he took my youngest daughter's guitar and started to play the most beautiful and inspired music. It was a brilliant improvisation, which looked very easy, and one could think of a well-known arrangement, as the music went on so brilliantly.

At a time, embarrassed with this fingerboard he was using for the first time, he failed an extremely difficult run. He made this run again three or four times with incredible velocity and clarity, and with a broad grin, resumed the improvisation, which became more and more rich and structured.

Baden Powell hardly eats when he's invited to lunch, he picks vaguely in his plate, then he cuddles up in a corner to listen to a record. If one of the guests shows, by a remark, a move, a

laugh, or a cry, that he really understood the secrets intent of the musician, Baden stands up, hugs him, kisses him and then goes back in his corner.

Baden Powell is a giant, a monster, a master, he's ...(I was about to use a terribly gross word), and he's the most obvious musical genius that I ever met. He's totally crazy, incredible!

If you haven't been lucky enough to hear him in the flesh, go and get his LPs, they're all very different, but all perfect. **Maurice Cullaz, 1970**

Many thanks to Jerome Outhier for his translation.