



A Little Bit Crossover

Teen pop isn't over until the Brazilian kids sing

Blame it on Rio, of course. Ask your average music lover in this country about the rhythms of Brazil, and you may get three postcard-worthy descriptions: cool, bubbly, bring-out-the-caipirinha type of sounds (bossa nova); sexy, sweaty, and acrobatic (samba, lambada); or just plain camp (hey, it's Carmen Miranda time!) What you probably won't hear associated with Brazil is the term teen pop.

That, however, may change if two young, photogenic kids from the city of Campinas manage to parlay across the globe the astounding popularity they have enjoyed for the past decade in their native country.

The sister-and-brother duo of Sandy & Junior are stars in Brazil the way Britney Spears or Backstreet Boys are here. According to their record label, Universal Music, they are the most successful act in the history of Brazilian pop music, selling some 12 million albums in a career that spans over a dozen recordings.

Almost three decades ago, balladeer Roberto Carlos became Brazil's top record-selling artist, hitting it big outside the country with his singing in Portuguese and Spanish. Few, however, were able to follow in his footsteps until Alexandre Pires, lead singer for samba/pagode band So Pra Contrariar, began to get noticed in the United States. To make an effective transition, though, Pires had to sing in Spanish, learn to speak the language, go solo in foreign markets (he remains with the band in Brazil), and even record a duet with crossover expert Gloria Estefan.

Now, Sandy and (Durval) Junior de Lima, ages nineteen and eighteen respectively, are going to give it a go. Short of world domination, Universal Music has high hopes for them. Their first album targeted for international consumption is a self-titled sweet-as-a-sugar-loaf project recorded in Spanish, English, and Portuguese in Los Angeles last year. Sandy & Junior, released in the United States on July 16, features producers who have worked with pop favorites such as Ace of Base, S Club 7, Atomic Kitten, Britney Spears, and Backstreet Boys.

"I think they will become one of the greatest acts in the world," enthuses Richard Ogden, the duo's international manager. "They have that special something, and they really know what they are about."

And when does he envision them blossoming all over the Americas?

"In three or four years," says Ogden. "I have been impressed by them on every level. I felt it was my lucky day when I got called."

Ogden should know a thing or two about luck. From 1987 to 1993, he recounts, he was worldwide manager for Paul McCartney. After that, as senior VP of marketing for Sony Europe, he had a lot to do with unleashing Ricky Martin on the non-Spanish-speaking world.

"I was the first person Angelo Medina [Martin's long-time manager] and Ricky ever met in Europe," says Ogden. "We took him from Latin America to Europe, Asia, and then the U.S."



Something of that sort is what he has in mind for Sandy & Junior. At least, beginning in this country's Hispanic communities.

"The strategy is to connect them to their cultural roots. They're Latinos, and the language, the philosophy, and the outlook of life is quite similar," offers Ogden on bridging the gap between Spanish and Portuguese-speaking audiences. "Listen, Ricky Martin was selling records in Spanish in Sweden, so I know we can do this!"

There may be just a little problem, however: Sandy & Junior, who speak English reasonably well, are not as good in Spanish. And it is Spanish-speaking audiences, and not the Swedes, whom they are trying to conquer. *Portuñol* (a blend of Portuguese and Spanish the duo employ humorously) may only take them so far.

"It is imperative that they learn to speak Spanish -- otherwise, when they come to this country or visit the rest of Latin America, they're going to have a hard time connecting," says the publicity director for a major rival recording label, who asked to remain anonymous. The publicist speaks from experience, having worked with artists whose first language is neither Spanish nor English but who have tried, some with better results than others, to make it in the Spanish markets.

"Also complicating things is the fact that the Hispanic youth market in this country is really difficult to work with," says the rival. "In Mexico, in Puerto Rico, in the rest of Latin America, there are many more radio programs or stations that play this kind of music, but not here. Here, most kids will listen to pop in English."

Which is why the Sandy & Junior album also includes songs in English, like the first single, "Love Never Fails" ("El Amor No Fallará").

"But then, what are they going after?" wonders the publicist. "The Hispanic market in the U.S. or the English-language market? I would define it more."

Planning and strategies don't seem to concern the duo that much.

"It will be interesting to see what is going to happen," says Junior, who sings, plays guitar, and dabbles in drums and percussion while performing with his sister.

"We like this. It is exciting and new," adds Sandy, whose vocal prowess could easily rival Mariah Carey's. "I get nervous, but at the same time, I am so happy to show who we are to those parts of the world that don't know us."

Whether discussing plans with the press or performing in front of thousands of screaming girls (and, boy, do they scream when they see Junior), the stars are never far from their parents. Onstage, there is never an improper word or a lewd gesture. This is the purest, cleanest, and most Americanized Brazilian entertainment you'll get anywhere.

Sandy & Junior's father, Durval de Lima (also called Xororó), enjoyed success in his own right as one of the biggest stars in *sertaneja* (think Brazil's country music). He is also a restaurateur, with several establishments under the name of Montana Grill. Dad was, the kids say, quite an inspiration in their upbringing.



"When we started, at six and five years of age, we were kind of country ourselves," says Sandy, almost echoing Marie Osmond. "We were little kids, influenced by our father. And for two years we did his music. Then we turned to pop. It evolved naturally."

Something else that evolved naturally, they say, was their own TV show. Four years ago, the duo pitched to Rede Globo de Televisão, Brazil's largest TV network, the idea for a *seriado* (series) set at first in their hometown, which would be sort of a cross between *The Partridge Family* and *Dawson's Creek*. After three years Sandy & Junior moved to Rio de Janeiro, where Sandy is supposed to be a dancer and Junior dabbles in a recording studio.

"We had a TV show for six months when we were fourteen or fifteen, and we really liked the experience," says Sandy on their foray into TV land. "Later we decided to do the pilot for this show, shopped it around and Globo loved it." Brazilians seem to love it as well. Although it's not as euphoria-inducing as a soccer game, every Sunday half of the nation's TV-watching audience is glued to Sandy & Junior's adventures.

"It's just another part of our careers, and a lot of fun," adds Junior matter-of-factly.

How will they handle their small-screen duties when they are away from Brazil?

"It's difficult, but we can organize our time," says Sandy. "We were already busy before this whole international thing started, so we'll manage."

So far Sandy & Junior have engaged in a limited European sojourn (if it's Tuesday, it must be Lisbon!), hitting markets that David Alvarado, senior product manager for Universal Music Latino in Miami (in charge of marketing for Sandy & Junior, Paulina Rubio, Enrique Iglesias, and Luis Fonsi in the U.S. and Puerto Rico), calls "essential."

"Sandy & Junior are a global priority for Universal Music, and wherever the first single has come out, all the markets have worked really hard, and radio programmers have responded well," says Alvarado, who refers to their Miami and Puerto Rico stops in late July as "an introductory visit."

"We know the first time is never easy, but the success they have had in Brazil, in Europe, and in Mexico will allow us to build on that," continues Alvarado. "The fact that they sing in Portuguese, in English, in Spanish, and in French [on two songs for the album's September release in France] makes them different. They actually sing, and, whenever possible, do it live. They've been around for ten years, are pros at what they do, and know how to charm an audience."

One industry veteran charmed by them is Pilar Revoredo, director of talent and artists at Zeal TV US; the company produces *La Cartelera PepsiTV* show, which airs on Univision's sister network, *Telefutura*.

"After seeing them perform in Brazil and experiencing their phenomenal success there, I think they will be able to repeat it over here," says Revoredo, who books the hottest Latin stars for her show and hopes to do the same with Sandy & Junior. "If Universal gives them the support they need, they will make it."

That label's marketing manager in London, Kate Bartlett, vows they will.

"What's not to like about these kids? They are multilingual, they are sweet, beautiful, and children love them," says Bartlett. "They can't fail."

And just like Sandy & Junior's song says, love never does.