

**Identidade principal**

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**Assunto:** Gilberto Gil Interview for Billboard  
 Dear Gil and Meny,

Below please find a copy of the interview for Billboard. I am very pleased to see that they allowed the extra material I included. It was a pleasure speaking with you.

To what address should I have Billboard mail a copy?

Best regards,  
 Gerald Seligman

**'Music Talks To Man's Spirit'; LARAS Honors Gilberto Gil**

BY GERALD SELIGMAN

The pace Gilberto Gil maintains well into his fourth decade as a musician/public figure is remarkable. At a time of life when others might well rest on their laurels, the 61-year-old Brazilian won't stop for an instant.

Billboard caught up with him at his governmental office in Brasília after his return from a European tour with Maria Bethânia. Yes, Gil is Brazil's Minister of Culture, appointed by new President Luis Ignacio "Lula" da Silva in recognition of his integrity, artistic and political importance and continuing impact.

In light of all this, the Latin Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (LARAS) is recognizing Gil with its Person of the Year honor.

Gil was there at the birth of música popular Brasileira, the movement that saw a generation of supremely accomplished composers and performers change the course of popular music. What made them exceptional was the answer they found to an age-old conundrum: how to modernize while still holding true to tradition.

>From Bahia in the Northeast, Gil and lifelong friends Caetano Veloso, Gal Costa and Bethânia moved south to Sao Paulo, then to Rio de Janeiro, where with new friends like Chico Buarque, Milton Nascimento and Elis Regina they ushered in a musical revolution by looking back as they sped forward.

Their first revolution came in the late 1960s, when Gil, Caetano, Tom Zé and others sought to apply the musical lessons of the Beatles' "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band" to a distinctly Brazilian sound. They called it tropicália. Though the movement only lasted from 1967-69, it opened doors that Brazilian musicians still pass through today.

Tropicália was so rich in diversity and so shocking to the prevailing sensibilities at the time that Gil and Caetano were arrested, imprisoned and then exiled by the military government. They returned from London three years later only after a mild political thaw.

By then, Gil had heard Bob Marley, and it helped nurture his lifelong interest in Pan-Africanism and international black culture.

But Gil never strayed far from a loving exploration of the Afro-Brazilian roots of his native Northeast. Though he has recorded nearly 40 albums, he always talks animatedly of the ones yet to come.

Gil developed a parallel career in the late 1980s when he returned to Bahia to head a cultural foundation dedicated to the preservation of its capital, Salvador. It soon led him to a four-year stint as town councilor, with an emphasis on cultural issues. From there, he became president of the Commission for the Defense of the Environment. By 1989, he was on the executive committee of the national Green Party, leading to his current post as Brazilian Minister of Culture. He divides his time among political, environmental and musical activities.

This has been an exemplary and extraordinary career. Imprisoned by one government, he came to be appointed minister by another. It is a sign of how far Brazil has come, certainly, but also of the integrity, consistency and accomplishment of one remarkable citizen. But don't expect Gil to be tethered to his desk. He's got plans for the future.

We spoke in the late 1980s, when you were Minister of Culture for Bahia. At the time, you explained how difficult it was to

"institutionalize" support for the arts and music. Now that you are Minister of Culture for Brazil, do you find the task any easier?

It's even more difficult. It's a big country, and resources haven't increased in the past decades. We have a small budget, basically, and the local governments have their own budget problems and problems of public policies.

In an ideal situation, what can governments do to help the arts and music in particular?

Several things. First of all, it could be a sort of agent itself, like a promoter, to invest in cultural programs. Second, it could promote communication between the creative area, private investors and government agencies. Third, legislation. The government can help Congress and other legislative areas improve laws; for instance, in terms of artist rights and in helping corporations to invest more in culture and so on. There are many kinds of activities governments can generate.

What are the biggest obstacles to the job you would like to see removed?

Money.

How would you describe the current state of the music industry at home and abroad?

The music industry is a chain, not just one thing. First, we have the creative area, which we could say is going well. People are very inventive; they keep doing, trying, innovating, producing. Then we have the performing sector, and this is not doing too well, because it depends upon resources and means. They need local support, theaters, stages, projects to help them expose their creative production. And then we get to economics, of course, and conditions are critical at the moment.

The record business is in crisis now. But the crisis affects mostly the areas that are not well-developed, like South America and Brazil. And radio is a problem, too, because commercial interests are more into managing than music. It's a critical moment in our countries.

There is a sense that we are at a crossroads and the industry will never be the same. What do you think will happen in the next few years?

I don't really know. Show business is different; it's OK because people always want live performance, and the issues are just how to manage the sector. But the new technologies have created a crisis for music as a product. Watching the horizon, I cannot see anything other than the free access to music leading to a situation of drastic change of the industrial model.

In North America and Europe, computer ownership is commonplace, so downloading, swapping and burning CDs is easy. How does this compare with South America and Brazil?

Piracy here is being done through the traditional means, like illegal copies being sold on the street. Downloading and exchanging archives is just a small part of the problem, but it is increasing as computers become more accessible. Then it will be a situation similar to the ones in the U.S. and Europe.

What can the music industry do to help revive itself? In North America, there is an increasing emphasis on legal remedies. Is this the best way to tackle the problem?

The traditional, legal approach doesn't fit anymore. I don't believe that new laws will work in the long run, unless they stop technological development, which is impossible. This free access is going to be the rule, the standard. The trouble is, I don't think the government and industry can do much more than they are now. Trying to enforce laws and trying to establish controls for the uses of technology like encryption is all fine. But it will just go so far.

The first thing I would suggest would be a very careful and intelligent monitoring of the process, accompanying what is going on and being prepared for some new models. It's the only understandable attitude for the industry. The industry has to be more creative; it's not like factories producing and selling units. They are still thinking in [terms of] the final products—CDs—which is an almost extinct animal.

The major companies have to prepare for just becoming producers and distributors of archives and not traditional product sellers like they are now.

Artists like yourself from the generation that revolutionized Brazilian popular music in the late 1960s and early 1970s—Caetano, Chico, Milton and the great interpreters like Bethânia, Gal and others—have now been on the scene for many years. How would you describe your place in contemporary music? How do you stay relevant?

I just keep doing it. I keep performing and writing songs to keep active as an artist. And I stay attentive to what is happening in the economy and the politics of music. This is my way to keep contributing to the educational process of the new generations: by testimony and by action and attentiveness.

With your current government role, how do you find time to further your artistic aims? What musical projects do you have planned in the coming year?

I had a guarantee that I could keep performing, which gives me what I really need. What I like most is to perform. I have a big repertoire. I'm also thinking about recording. I'm carefully and slowly preparing a record of samba for next year.

This is a year of honors for you. You have been named LARAS' Person of the Year. Do you have any plans on how you might use this honor to further your cultural aims?

I think that the prestige and honor help my reputation, so to speak, and it reflects positively if well-used in my public work.

How would you summarize what it is you are trying to do as a musician, as a citizen and as a cultural minister?

My goal is to help my country and to help my planet establish a more civilized and acceptable process of social change and understanding. I'm looking for a better human society.

Do you feel music plays a role in improving society?

Music is something that talks to the spiritual side of man. It's also a great means of communication in terms of language and understanding in the broadest sense. Through music we can cover a lot of different aspects of human society. I'm interested in how it all fits together.