

SIMEI MONTEIRO HONORED AS A FELLOW OF THE HYMN SOCIETY



As a young church musician in Brazil, I (Marcell) kept running into Simei Monteiro's name. She was mentioned in academic symposia on church music, hymnology circles, and practitioner conversations across Protestant denominations. But it was only years later, while doing doctoral work, that I began to appreciate Simei's contributions, not only to Brazilian congregational song, but also as a global advocate for cultural justice and the inclusion of underrepresented voices at the table of church music scholarship and practice.

Born in Belém, the capital of Brazil's northern Pará state, Simei was involved in music since her childhood, both in the church and outside of it. Her family moved south to Rio de Janeiro, where Simei graduated with a Sacred Music degree from the Baptist Seminary. There she delved into the wealth of Brazilian musics that came to deeply infuse her work and was encouraged by missionary Joan Sutton to pursue her interest in writing and hymn translation. In the 1970s, Monteiro studied at ISEDET in Buenos Aires with Pablo Sosa, FHS. She later spent time teaching at Southern Methodist University's Perkins School of Theology in Dallas, Texas, and at the Methodist University in São Paulo. She holds several other degrees, has taught at other institutions in Brazil and abroad, and her work has been translated into various languages.

Within the Brazilian context, Simei has long been recognized as an advocate for the infusion of the Christian message with local flavors. Working with missionary Nora Buyers, she was involved in the production of *A Nova Canção (A New Song)*, an early song collection that gathered fresh expressions of Brazilian congregational music. This publication arose in the context of interconfessional conversations about liturgy, music, and the use of the vernacular in the wake of the Second Vatican Council that gave birth to the *Nova Cancão* movement in Brazil. A few years later, Monteiro and Jaci Maraschin released a new ecumenical songbook, *A Canção do Senhor na Terra Brasileira (The Song of God in Brazilian Lands)*, which remains a staple expression of the work of her generation.

Monteiro's ministry has led her far beyond Brazil's borders. She was involved with the global song movement through the work of the United Methodist Church's Global Praise Project, and served as music enlivener and/or worship consultant for the World Council of Churches between 2001-2009. Simei views her calling and her work in ways that are deeply Brazilian but also ecumenical and global. For her, composers of liturgical music express both their individual faith and the reality around them. Composers write for themselves, but also for their siblings in the faith, and should do so in ways that express the cultures in which they are grounded and flourish. In other words, Monteiro writes as a service to God's people, but also to service the service of God's people: the act of worship. Even as her ecumenical work demonstrates a commitment to global Christian community and ecumenical conversations, she remains deeply

rooted in the Brazilian reality. For Simei, to produce Brazilian liturgical music remains a necessary act of resistance and daring in the face of normative colonial expectations that Christians everywhere subscribe to North Atlantic sensibilities and aesthetic conceptions of Christian musicking.

At the Centennial Conference of The Hymn Society in Washington in 2021, I performed Simei's "A Nova Canção" (the song that became the title of *A Nova Canção*) with a group of Argentinean colleagues. The song sounds as fresh and lively today as it did decades ago. We had the privilege of having Simei "drop in" virtually during that session and expressed our thanks for her legacy and ministry. To see her nominated as a Fellow of The Hymn Society is an appropriate distinction that reflects Simei's contributions, but also demonstrates The Hymn Society's willingness to sustain its hospitality towards voices hailing from beyond Northern Christianity.

In the meantime, Simei continues as busy as ever. A few years ago, she published *Mil Vozes Para Celebrar: Hinos de Charles Wesley e de John Wesley*, a bilingual collection of eighty-five translated Wesley hymns. A few months ago, we met at a local coffee shop in Curitiba, South Brazil, where she lives with Jairo, her husband. She brought along a bag full of books and notes, as well as more wisdom and experience than I could possibly absorb. I remain grateful not only for her work, but for her shining and lively personality, for the clarity of her pastoral calling to the music of the church, and for her willingness to respond to that calling through words and music.

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