

## Brazil Sound: A Highly Emotive Blend Celebrates Jobim

Written by Bruce Gilman

Monday, 19 September 2005 19:44

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While fine art can definitely arrive in conventional containers, we experience another kind of seductive and elevating glow when music, already rich with timeless magic, is delivered from a unique perspective. In the years since Jobim's death all manner of material has been found and issued on a variety of labels.

In addition to the posthumous releases and album reissues, including the classic *Elis & Tom* with static photographic images marketed as a DVD, there has been a plethora of tribute concerts. After this year's Hollywood Bowl Jobim tribute went awry, despite the impressive lineup of names, another scheduled Tom Jobim tribute, at first, seems baffling.

But it's simple: first, Brazilian Nites Productions, the husband and wife company that has been enhancing Southern California's concert-going experience, furthering a sense of community with stunning Brazilian musicians (Caetano, Olodum, Beth Carvalho, Grupo Fundo de Quintal, Elba Ramalho, Djavan) for over a decade, is promoting the tribute; second, the group that Brazilian Nites has brought together is an ensemble, not of waning pop stars, but a group that breathes their own life into Jobim's music, that creates new freedoms within the structures in order to stimulate and provoke spontaneity.

This band performs at an almost extrasensory level of inspiration, bringing such aplomb and pace to the music of Tom Jobim that it makes all comparisons, save with the composer himself, a study in irrelevance. Each of the musicians is an exceptional talent who has blossomed on a wide variety of fronts from choro, jazz, and classical to bossa nova, trio elétrico, M.P.B., and samba de gafieira.

Making their own guidelines, stretching a song's form to the breaking point, creating enormous tension between freer phrasing impulses and the restrictions that the song's form imposes; they stimulate one another to better and more resourceful playing. During any solo, this group becomes the soloist's band, enabling the ensemble to be freer in many details, and at the same time seem more inevitable as a whole.

More than a question of structure, of judicious shaping of phrases, of continuity of thought; it is the way all these elements are projected and the way they are transmuted into emotional drama that gives the quartet its unmistakable coherence and its listeners an astonishing look at intimate and instinctive musical communication.

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Each quartet member - Armandinho, mandolin and Bahian guitar; Paulo Moura, clarinet and sax; Gabriel Improta, guitar; and Robertinho Silva, percussion - is an organic part of the band's total concept to promote Tom Jobim's music through instrumental interpretation and thereby create greater awareness and appreciation.

Courting danger, composer, conductor, arranger, and woodwind virtuoso Paulo Moura thrives on challenge. His phrasing is consummately tasteful; his tone, even under torrents of notes, never glaring. Conservatory trained (he studied counterpoint with Guerra-Peixe and orchestration with Moacir Santos), Moura's international career as a soloist started with the orchestra of Ary Barroso, conducting the Moscow Symphonic Orchestra, and traveling to Argentina with the Orquestra de Severino Araújo.

Shortly after his first recording as a soloist, Paganini's *Moto Perpetuo* (Perpetual Motion), he became the first chair clarinet player in the Orquestra Sinfônica do Teatro Municipal. He joined Sérgio Mendes, playing alto sax, and performed at the legendary Festival of Bossa Nova in Carnegie Hall.

Moura also recorded as a member of Edison Machado's group, along with Moacir Santos and Tião Neto. Yet, the many-leveled nature of the choro canon, has always exerted a gravitational pull on him. In 2002, he was the headliner at Muziekcentrum's three-day choro festival in the Netherlands, and his CD *Pixinguinha* won the first Latin Grammy. Moura's numerous other recordings serve as marvelous snapshots of his constantly evolving art.

Less a timekeeper than rhythmic instigator, Robertinho Silva has been in constant demand from the time he was fifteen years old and has become one of a handful of drummers who have moved decisively beyond the roll of a mere accompanist and into the sphere of musical leadership.

Silva not only shapes the styles and directions of the groups he plays with, he knows how to both understate and overstate to bring the right message from the music. Pushing singers and soloists to their limits, and then some, Silva has worked with Mônica Salmaso, Emilio Santiago, João Donato, Gilberto Gil, Moacir Santos, Gal Costa, Chico Buarque, João Bosco, Egberto Gismonti, Wayne Shorter, Cal Tjader, and Sarah Vaughan, among others.

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His status as one of Brazilian music's greatest drummers, however, stems from the preeminent part he has been playing since 1969 in the bands of Milton Nascimento; the bond between singer/songwriter and percussionist has assured a continual drive of inspired creation.

Gabriel Improta personifies a marvelous kind of musical schizophrenia, expressing in both composition and performance, distinct, immediately recognizable talents. Whether playing single-line solos that combine inner strength with a delicacy in approach, or essaying chordal work with an enviable awareness of dynamics, Improta is a sensitive, lyrical musician with a warm, sonorous tone who sounds like a full rhythm section in accompaniment.

His writing distinguishes itself by bringing listeners into an intensely personal vision and expressive range that stretches the Brazilian jazz genre to new parameters without breaking its thread. At only thirty years old, he has already performed with Elza Soares, Ithamara Koorax, Carol Saboya, Carlos Malta, Francis Hime, Barrozinho (Banda Black Rio), and Dona Ivone Lara.

Although no one disc can be described as representative of such a versatile talent, his debut recording, *É o Violão do Brasil!* (It's the Guitar of Brazil!) offers a wonderful display of instrumental bravura in the challenging context of extended improvisation.

Improta's textures are superbly graded, his mind and fingers flashing with reflexes merely dreamt of by other less phenomenally endowed guitar players. In this tribute quartet, the presence of Armandinho releases Improta from the dilemma of being the eternal harmonic provider for all soloists, so he can go his own chosen direction rather than have to steer the vessel of each tune.

Armandinho is Brazil's leading representative of trio elétrico and its most celebrated exponent of guitarra baiana (Bahian guitar), a 5-string electric mandolin. His history is a fascinating chronicle that recounts remarkable feats of creativity, experimentation, and assured technical prowess.

Noted for his collaborations with Moraes Moreira, the Trio Elétrico Dodô & Osmar, A Cor do Som, and Época de Ouro; Armandinho delivers an apparently unquenchable flow of

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improvisational ideas that imparts a relaxed informality to everything he plays; a discreetly propulsive power, which imbues all his music with a powerful empathy.

A dominant voice in Brazil's rejuvenated choro movement, Armandinho was nominated for the 2004 Latin Grammy in the Best Instrumental Album category for his recording *Retocando o Choro Ao Vivo*

(Biscoito Fino) and included in the list of final nominations. This Jobim tribute and its Rolls-Royce quartet of Brazilian musicians promises to be both a superb example of how sublime Jobim can sound when all the components are in synch and the perfect showcase for Armandinho's prodigious technical and conceptual skills.

Southern Californians will experience two Brazilian guitar players engaged while at the top of their powers, exploring not only tonality and the dynamic and harmonic possibilities that exist between two instruments, but also the expanded notions of how the different players' styles and musical intuitions dovetail, rather than work in opposition.

From the early sixties, when the recording of "Desafinado" by Stan Getz and Charlie Bird sold over a million copies, Antonio Carlos Jobim's impact on the North American jazz scene has been imploding. It would be more accurate to say, in terms of his refined harmonic complexion, his piano economy, his classically influenced forms arranged in popular formats, that Jobim has had as powerful an influence on American song as has Cole Porter or Irving Berlin.

Still, to position Jobim thus, without cognizance of the sweep Chopin, Debussy, Ravel, Stravinsky, and Villa-Lobos exerted on him would be to reduce Jobim's universal importance. As a composer, not only of popular music and film scores, but of the chamber music and symphonic works constantly postponed by the success of the musical revolution he brought about, Jobim was a visionary.

His incalculable affect, altering hearing in Brazil and all over the world, represented qualities of the human spirit that went beyond the notes he wrote and played. On Friday, September 30, the Los Angeles Ford Amphitheatre's World Festival of Sacred Music celebrates art and entertainment as ritual, paying homage to Antonio Carlos Jobim and his continually reinvented expressions of emotion - a celebration that itself will be a revelation.

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### Selected Discography:

Artist	Title	Label	Date
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Armandinho *Retocando o Choro* Tom Brasil 1999

Armandinho/ *O Melhor do Chorinho* □ CID 1997  
Época de Ouro *Ao Vivo*

Armandinho and *Musical - Série Música* Tom Brasil 1996  
Raphael Rebello *Viva*

A Cor do Som *A Cor do Som* Atlantic/WEA 1977

Gabriel Improta *É o Violão do Brasil!* Kalimba 2003

Sincronia Carioca *Sincronia Carioca* Rádio MEC/ 2002  
Rob Digital

Carol Saboya *Sessão Passatempo* Eldorado 2000

Carlos Malta *Pimenta* □ 500 Anos 2000  
De Som

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Paulo Moura & *Pixinguinha* Blue Jackel 1998  
Os Batutas

Paulo Moura & *Dois Irmãos* Caju 1991  
Raphael Rabello

Paulo Moura *Mistura e Manda* Kuarup 1983

Edison Machado *Edison Machado é* Columbia 1964  
*Samba Novo*

Robertinho Silva *Shot on Goal* Caju 1995  
(Milestone)

Robertinho Silva *Speak no Evil* Caju 1991  
(Milestone)

Milton Nascimento *Angelus* Warner Bros. 1986

Milton Nascimento *A Barca dos Amantes* Verve 1986