



One of the most noteworthy examples of neoclassical architecture in Brazil, the *Teatro de Santa Isabel* (1850), extended a very large welcome mat to musicians from both Brazil and the United States last week for the first Festival Moacir Santos, a celebration of the Maestro's work and a perspective of its impact in the United States.

Gracing the Pompeiian red theater's stage were Mark Levine & The Latin Tinge, Banda Ouro Negro, Quarteto Coisas, and The Clare Fischer Big Band; however, it was the festival director and flute player, Andrea Ernest Dias, who kept the event humming on an intimate and spirited scale. It was as much a social event as a purely musical one.

Widely recognized for her flute performing and recording and renowned for her doctoral dissertation, *More "Things" about Moacir Santos or the Journey of a Brazilian Musician*, Dias, along with production teams in Rio and Recife, coordinated all aspects of this first significant homage to Santos in his homeland.

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Says Dias, "The festival is an outgrowth of my doctoral dissertation, like a sound text, which is why musicians from California are in the casting. The far-reaching idea is to trace the line of Moacir's life through its three main backdrops: Pernambuco, Rio, and Los Angeles. Our sponsor, BNDES (*Banco Nacional de Desenvolvimento Econômico e Social*), provided a budget this year that has enabled the first phase, Pernambuco. The good news is that for 2014, we have acquired another public grant from *Banco do Brasil* to produce the festival in Sao Paulo, Rio, Belo Horizonte, and Brasília."

It's taken far too long for musicians--and through them, the world's audiences--to recognize the substantial creative credentials of the late Brazilian composer. Despite valiant efforts by Mario Adnet and Zé Nogueira, pioneers in rescuing Santos's music from obscurity, all his music is underrepresented in current recording catalogs. In 1997, Jack O'Neil of Blue Jackel Records

attempted to license Santos's Blue Note masters for reissue. Terms were agreed upon, but searching the Blue Note vaults to retrieve the masters proved futile; nothing could be found. Interestingly, the three Blue Note recordings are currently available as Japanese imports.

Moacir Santos was born in the remote and arid interior of Pernambuco on July 26, 1926. With no radio or victrola, the rare opportunities he had to hear music were limited either to outdoor band concerts or performances given in the church. Imitating the musicians in the town's band by improvising on tin cans and bamboo flutes was his preferred form of play during his early childhood. And because he was present at all their rehearsals and his inclination for music was so strong, the musicians selected him to watch their instruments between concerts.

When they returned, it appeared that the boy had done more than just "watch," he had played all of their instruments. Many years later, Santos would study theory, harmony, counterpoint, and composition with Guerra Peixe, Hans Joachim Koellreutter, to whom he became an assistant, and Ernst Krenek, who was astounded by how quickly Santos had mastered Schoenberg's twelve-tone technique.

During the forties and fifties, Santos worked extensively in clubs and on the radio with jazz bands and orchestras and was referred to as "fera do saxofone" (loosely translated as saxophone monster). In 1954, he was invited to direct the *Orquestra da TV Record* in São Paulo, and by 1956, Santos had become Ary Barroso's assistant artistic director for the record label Rozemblit, as well as the conductor of orchestras recording for *Copacabana Discos*.

In the sixties, his career reached a high point when he was invited to write soundtracks for film, whose plots were written or directed by notables like Jorge Amado, Sacha Gordine, Cacá Diegues, and Ruy Guerra. During this same period he was teaching a growing number of fledgling musical luminaries, including Paulo Moura, Roberto Menescal, Nara Leão, Dori Caymmi, Carlos Lyra, Sérgio Mendes, Eumir Deodato, Oscar Castro Neves, Baden Powell, Do Um Romão, João Donato, Maurício Einhorn, Bola Sete, Alaide Costa, Aírto Moreira, Flora Purim, and the members of the vocal groups Quarteto em Cy and Os Cariocas.

His LP *Coisas* (Things) was released in 1965 on the Forma label; however, all the charts and arrangements for the recording have been lost. Santos explained at the time that he wanted his works numerically cataloged like classical pieces, but as his music was considered popular and

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because using the word *Opus*, (meaning work of art, piece, creation, or composition) would have been presumptuous, he referred to his pieces as *coisas*

. That same year, he wrote his first soundtrack for an American movie, *Love in the Pacific*

, and the following year he was nominated to The American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP).

In 1967, Santos settled in the United States permanently; there he taught, worked with Henry Mancini, met Horace Silver who urged the Blue Note label to record Santos's music, and cultivated a lasting friendship with pianist Clare Fischer who worked on *Maestro* (Blue Note, 1972) and *Carnival of the Spirits*

(Blue Note, 1975). From quite humble beginnings and learning to play intuitively, Santos ripened into a gifted multi-instrumentalist, composer, conductor, arranger, professor, and celebrated renovator of Brazilian Popular Music, only to fall silent after the 1979 release of his album, interestingly titled, *Opus 3 No 1*

Thus, a two-day festival with music and discussions focusing on his musical legacy was fitting.

Undoubtedly, Santos would have been delighted to see his life commemorated at Recife's most expressive example of neoclassical architecture, the one historic theater in Brazil recognized for its National Historic and Artistic Heritage.

On Friday, August 2, *Teatro de Santa Isabel* brimmed with justifiable energy as a lively full-house of 850 participated in the first-ever iteration of Festival Moacir Santos. There was a mix of everything from wise-looking elders in formal evening attire to members of the younger generation in T-shirts and jeans all drawn to the festival by the enduring spirit of a musician who both reconsidered and changed Brazilian music at countless levels of composition and performance.

The night began on an experienced note with Mark Levine and the Latin Tinge, a group that knows this music and revels in it. Following the principle rather than the letter of Santos's pioneering, the ensemble performed a dozen compositions from their recording *Off and On: The Music of Moacir Santos*

. "The arrangements themselves," says Levine, "are 95% what Moacir had for two of his Blue Note releases,

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*Maestro*  
and  
*Saudade*  
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Levine, who had played and recorded with Santos, showed impeccable taste in his choice of collaborators (Mary Fettig, soprano sax and flute; John Wiitala, bass; Michaelle Goerlitz, percussion; and Celso Alberti, drums), Bay Area-based musicians whose work complemented the sound and prerequisites of the music.

Combining Afro-Cuban dance forms with instrumental jazz their interplay was even more developed than on the album. Fettig in particular distinguished herself with a series of finely-wrought solos, bringing an intensely personal vision and expressive range to the material. The standout piece was the odd-metered "Kathy." Fettig's treatment of the 5/4 tune was radical, but observant of its essence.

Ultimately this first night will be remembered for the performance by *Banda Ouro Negro* (Black Gold Band) under the direction of Mario Adnet and Zé Nogueira, arranger/producers whose determined advocacy of Moacir Santos has sustained a fierce commitment for more than a decade. Adnet and Nogueira have ears for timbre and texture, are interested in the individual balance between scored and improvised sections, and with striking arrangements, draw a seemingly impossible degree of detail from the relatively small forces at their disposal.

The group's affinities with Santos were felt at the opening of their program. They commenced with a riveting performance of "Coisa No. 2" that left audience members awestruck, then continued sorting through the complexities of Santos's colorful orchestrations, giving the audience a direct entry into the Maestro's world. And, Adnet and Nogueira were well-served by a stellar cast of band members, many of whom had worked on the Moacir Santos projects, *Choros & Alegria* and *Ouro Negro*, recordings that utilized a group similar to the one Santos assembled for his landmark album *Coisas*.

Judicious use was made of a number of soloists with Zé Nogueira, Jessé Sadoc Jr., and

Marcelo Martins being the most persuasive in that role. Nogueira's soprano sax solo on "Amphibious" connected to the crowd like a strand of tonal sinew; the trumpet solo in 3/4 by Jessé Sadoc Jr. on "Coisa No. 6" ricocheted off the theater's 163-year-old pediments, and columns; and on "Lemurianos," Martin's volatile tenor in 5/4 soared into the outer reaches of tonality. "Moacir's music leads us to another place," says Martins, "a place inside ourselves."

The atmosphere was easy, the playing relaxed, the crowd exuberant. It was not just that everything was perfectly in place, but also that the musicians conveyed the mood of each piece with miraculous precision, ripping through all the changes with massive skill, intoxicatingly fluent in their improvisations. Details of timing, accent, and nuance were perfectly natural. On this first night, the stars must have been favorably aligned. Those attending witnessed the perfect combination of artists, material, and audience.

Earlier that day, the first Round Table discussions took place in the theater's main hall, the *Salã o Nobre*

. Panelists focused on two underlying themes: Moacir Santos, The Brazilian Duke Ellington? and The Impact of Moacir Santos's music in the United States; his Afro-Brazilian Jazz Language. The second day's discussions examined The Collected Works of Moacir Santos in Perspective and The Black Gold Project and its unfolding; Moacir Santos and future generations.

These discussions were particularly enriching because of the cross-section of people in attendance: academics, journalists, musicians, and dilettantes. A concern that one may never have imagined as important would turn out to be of vital interest to a panelist. And although generally passionate and highly participatory, conversations sporadically lost momentum at which point the grandeur of the slender arabesques, gilded mirrors, and friezes that adorned the oblong hall's pale stone background rivaled for my attention.

The second night opened with *choro*. Whether or not Friday night's opening concert was an exemplar of the second night's performances remained to be seen. The complex anatomy of *choro*

is one of its strongest and most important characteristics. It takes an artistic aptitude and a particular bravery to interpret this highly individual and exacting music. Combining these two characteristics may seem like recklessly inviting hazard, but Quarteto Coisas (Andrea Ernest Dias, flute; Marco César, bandolim; Maurício Carrilho, guitar; Paulo Braga, piano), a group of musicians who thrive on challenge, was well qualified to meet both.

The ensemble's repertory highlighted four *choros* by Santos: "Flores," Moacir's childhood municipality in Pernambuco; "Cleonix," the name of, and homage to his wife; "Não há dúvida," the audition piece Moacir wrote in 1948 for *Rádio Nacional*; and "Ricaom," Moacir spelled in retrograde and surely one of his finest pieces of musical architecture. In addition, they addressed ten pieces from Carrilho's series "Moacirsantosianas."

In 2005, guitar player Maurício Carrilho, set himself the task of composing every day, experimenting, searching for pieces that conveyed the same atmospheric feel as Moacir's *choros*.

"Moacir was always a reference for me, rhythmically, melodically, and harmonically," says Carrilho. "I was so pleased with the results that I named the collection 'Moacirsantosianas.' Performing these pieces and celebrating the legacy that Maestro left me and its decisive influence on my generation is a joy."

Playing with relaxed power, this small, cogent ensemble, achieved telepathic elegance, delivering a performance that was truthfully balanced and had a natural concert-hall perspective. Hearing them negotiate effortless lines through such terrain, their exemplary focus, spectacular dynamic range, and sustained interaction was *hors concours*.

The big group Saturday night, was The Clare Fischer Big Band under the direction of Brent Fischer with special guest Steve Huffsteter. Their selection of pieces was wide-ranging and varied. Says Fischer, "There are myriad decisions that go into crafting a set: variety, overall emotional impact, appropriateness, making sure most everyone gets a solo or some kind of feature. Moacir is an amalgamation of many and varied influences. Every song in our concert is related to him, as is most of the music we have written, via his approach to wind instruments, vocals, compositional technique, or emotional sensitivity and feel."

In addition to two contemporary jazz arrangements from Modest Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, the

set boasted six Clare Fischer classics including "Pensativa" and "Morning," two

*Coisas*

, (No. 2" and a revision of No. 8, which Moacir, having changed the feel from 6/8 to 2/2 and renamed "Solidão," presented as a gift to Clare Fischer), one bossa in 3/2 by Brent Fischer titled "Rainforest," and an original by Huffsteter, which he dedicated to and titled "Moacir."

Huffsteter's tune, in 3/4 with an anticipation of the fourth beat of every two bar phrase and its mix of latin rhythm and jazz harmony, summoned up an image of the Maestro's smile.

Fischer deftly guided the ensemble through syncopated rhythmic patterns, often surprisingly unconventional harmonies, and quirky Russian folk melodies. The horn section as a whole sounded very well focused, the unanimity of the trumpets, bright and forward, and their balance, finely judged. Fischer's comportment belied a keen control of texture, a firm grasp of tonal design, and a self-confident response to textual challenges. Each strand of sound was beautifully molded and characterized by biting section work and solos. Overall, the band was fresh, spirited, and clean-edged. This was strong playing on a high-protein program, both a climax and an affirmation of the first Festival Moacir Santos.

The festival was intense and brief, albeit never short on atmosphere. Teeming with beauty, surprises, challenges, and rewards, it ended Saturday night in high spirits. Andrea Ernest Dias had imported the kind of programming and virtuoso players particularly attuned to the music of Maestro Moacir Santos. Specific musical awareness and sensitivity, hallmarks of Maestro Moacir's work, evoked an experience, a sense of time and place, that was welcomed by connoisseurs of his music and nurtured the culture dedicated to this seminal figure of Brazilian music.

Festival Moacir Santos was an essential musical confrontation for all students of his work and an accurate pointer to where countless others have found significant musical sustenance. The music and architecture, both touching and eloquent tributes, triggered my nostalgia for symmetry and balance, for works with such complex simplicity. "So our virtues / Lie in th' interpretation of the time" (*Coriolanus* IV. vii.).

### Note:

1. The word "Things" in the dissertation title is an allusion to the 1965 Santos masterpiece recording on the Forma label, *Coisas*.

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