

40 Years of Road and Brazil's Ben Jor Is Still Fresh

Contributed by Ernest Barteldes
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Jorge Ben Jor needs little introduction – the legendary singer/guitarist has been around the Brazilian music business since the mid-sixties, when songs such as "Mas Que Nada" and "Que Pena" ("What a Pity") hit the airwaves and forever put Ben Jor (who was then simply known as Jorge Ben) on the musical map.

Mas Que Nada went on to become a bossa nova standard when Sergio Mendes included it on his Brazil 66 album, and nowadays rarely does a compilation of the genre come out without a version of the song.

Although having had his start by hopping onto the bossa nova gravy train (former Vinicius de Moraes partner Toquinho once claimed that he had helped Ben Jor write "Que Pena" – albeit without a song writing credit - in the early 60s), Jorge Ben had always admired American soul music, and during the 70s, he successfully started to blend his own samba roots with influences garnered from James Brown, George Clinton and others.

The result was a sound that was both unique and familiar – and many of his contemporaries, such as the late Tim Maia and Tony Tornado soon followed suit.

The onset of disco a few years later helped those Brazilian funk-fusion pioneers, for their songs were present all over the dance floors of Brazil alongside the usual hits by Donna Summer, Chic and Santa Esmeralda.

One international star, though, came a bit too close to Ben Jor's music.

In the late 70s, Rod Stewart had a huge hit with (Do You Think) I'm Sexy? , in which he used part of "Taj Mahal," a popular Jorge Ben song that had had a lot of airplay back then and that continues to be a staple at his shows.

The matter was soon settled, and whatever Rod Stewart paid was given as a charitable donation to Unicef.

During the 80s, Jorge Ben became Jorge Ben Jor, a move that, he then explained, had to do with the fact that music publishing companies had had some mix-ups with royalties concerning his songs and those of yet another legend, George Benson (I wonder how they are doing these days with Ryan and Bryan Adams). He also began touring abroad more regularly, and gaining recognition in the World Music/Alt-jazz circuit.

The early 90s saw a resurgence of Ben Jor's music in Brazil through remakes by artists such as dance music diva Fernanda Abreu and Rio rockers Barão Vermelho. Realizing that the moment was right, Ben Jor came up with 23, which contained the unstoppable hit "W/Brasil," a song that led its composer back to stadium gigs at the Hollywood Rock and the Rock in Rio II Festivals.

Ben Jor continues to perform and record regularly. By keeping his sound fresh, he has stayed on the top of the music business in Brazil despite his years. On the current tour he promotes his new album, Reactivus amor est (Turba Philosophorum), in which he flirts with electronic sounds, incorporating them to his trademark funky sound with very interesting results.

If you like jazz with a touch of pop, check out Josh Weinstein as he promotes his recently released album, Coming Home Hungry with a 10 PM appearance at Manhattan's Cutting Room. Weinstein plays a high-energy set, and his Petty Alchemy Band is formed by a group of fantastic musicians. For more on Josh, check out <http://www.joshweinstein.com>

Jorge Ben Jor
appearing at SOB's
Varick St. at Houston St.

Saturday, February 18th
and other national dates
For more information:
<http://www.ticketmaster.com>
<http://www.benjor.com.br>

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