

Johnson Machado's Vivacious Choro Is the Cat's Meow

Contributed by Brazzil Magazine
Thursday, 16 September 2004

All the new musical talent that abounds in Brazil notwithstanding, it's not everyday that one runs into a new choro album that delights and impresses as much as Johnson Machado's *Choramingando*. As a composer, Machado is a melodic master. As a clarinetist and saxophonist, he executes with grace and aplomb the challenging flights of fancy of Machado the composer.

by Daniella Thompson

Appearances to the contrary, Johnson Machado was born not quite 37 years ago in Fortaleza, Ceará. He comes from a musical family. His father plays accordion, his uncle is a guitarist, and his grandfather played a small accordion with eight bass buttons. It was only natural that Johnson would enter a children's band.

In 1987, at the age of 20, Machado enrolled in the Conservatório de Tatuí in São Paulo, studying under Nivaldo Donega. The following year he entered a clarinet course at the Universidade de Brasília, where he was the student of Luiz Gonzaga Carneiro.

The year 1993–94 found him in Rio de Janeiro, where he specialized at UFRJ under José Carlos de Castro. His studies took him to the United States, where he pursued a graduate course at the University of Miami under the classical clarinetist Margaret Donaghue. Another classical clarinetist, Steve Cohen, taught him at the Brevar Music Center in the summer of 1997.

Where does all this training lead? In Johnson's case, it led not to a symphony orchestra seat but to composing and arranging. And not only to classical music but to choro.

Building on his early years of playing MPB and on extra studies with José Botelho and Paulo Sérgio Santos, Johnson joined the conjunto regional H2O in Vitória, Espírito Santo.

As he says now, "Tive que me debruçar com dezenas e dezenas de chorinhos! Tomei gosto." (I had to deal with dozens and dozens of chorinhos! I acquired the taste.)

He liked it enough to record a whole album of his own compositions, which sound as if they'd been written in the golden age of choro, but with no trace of fustiness.

As Elvis Costello once sagely observed, "Writing about music is like dancing about architecture—it's a really stupid thing to want to do." What better way to experience the music than by listening to it? The only problem I had was in selecting the samples, because each track is as good as the next.

So here are selections from four Johnson Machado tunes.

"Choramingando," a classic choro, is arranged for clarinet, soprano sax, 6- and 7-string guitars, cavaquinho, and percussion (see musician list below). A virtuoso counterpoint between the two reed instruments lends special vivacity to the recording.

Perhaps it was Johnson Machado's youth in Ceará that inspired the infectious "Cateretê." Contributing nordestino flavor is Chiquinho Chagas' accordion. The sax this time is a tenor.

"Choro Esquísito" is just that—an M.C. Escher house of cards. Always threatening to topple over, meandering from one key to another, wandering in and out of tune, but progressing confidently just the same.

In "Curió," Machado is joined by flutist Andréa Ernest Dias (who also appears in "Boré") and H2O (who also play on "Jaó").

Another great favorite of mine is "Homenagem aos Chorões," which benefits from the added presence of flutist Alexandre Caldi, pandeirista Jó Reis, and bassist Jorjão Carvalho. In "Chorinho pro Lucas," composed for the author's baby son, the clarinet successfully imitates an infant's voice.

There are also lyrical tunes, like the beautiful "Choro Lento," where a solo clarinet is augmented by guitar and acoustic bass and later by muted accordion. "Nanquim" is an obstacle course for clarinet and Gabriel Improta's guitar.

Two frevos close the disc. "Raspando Tacho" is arranged for alto sax, accordion, guitar, acoustic bass, percussion and pandeiro. "Gagunça" (Machado's first composition) features a brass quintet and caixa drum.

In Johnson Machado we can look forward to a long and fruitful career destined to give music lovers years of pleasure. Choramingando may be purchased on the artist's official website.

Johnson
Machado: Choramingando
(Independent; 2004)
39:34 min.

All compositions by Johnson
Machado
Arrangements by Roberto Stepheson & Johnson Machado
Produced
by Roberto Stepheson

01. Choramingando
02. Boré
03. Cateretê
04. Choro Esquísito
05. Choro Lento
06. Nanquim
07. Jaó
08. Curió
09. Homenagem aos Chorões
10. Chorinho pro Lucas
11. Raspando Tacho
12. Gagunça

Johnson Machado: clarinet & alto
sax
Roberto Stepheson: saxophones
Guga Mendonça: guitar
Nando Duarte:
7-string guitar
Manoela Marinho: cavaquinho
Carlos César Motta: percussion

You can read more about Brazilian music and culture at
Daniella Thompson on Brazil here: <http://daniv.blogspot.com/>