

## Real Jazz, Really Brazilian

Contributed by Daniella Thompson  
Wednesday, 13 October 2004

American audiences discovered Filó Machado's jazzy samba and vocal pyrotechnics a few years ago, when Malandro Records released his album *Cantando um Samba*. Filó's voice, which might best be described as a jazzy Milton Nascimento, made *Cantando um Samba* Malandro's best-selling album.

But it was by no means his first. Filó is a veteran of over forty years, having begun at the age of ten to perform in dance bands of his native town, Ribeirão Preto, São Paulo state.

Filó Machado (photo courtesy of Lua Discos)

Many waters have passed under many bridges since then, and *Jazz de Senzala* is Filó's ninth solo album, featuring a number of his compositions dating from several decades, as well as the songs of others, with a spotlight on Minas Gerais.

Senzalas were the Brazilian slave quarters located behind the fazendeiro's house, the Casa Grande. From the senzalas came samba, just as jazz and blues had their roots in the North American plantation slave cabins.

Thus the title *Jazz de Senzala* both unites disparate musical genres that grew in similar circumstances and highlights the difference between the freedom of jazz expression and the captivity that served as its cradle.

"Procissão" is a percussive excursion into the Gilberto Gil song that Filó executes with nothing but voice and acoustic guitar and which ends on a crescendo:

Olha lá vai passando a procissão  
Se arrastando que nem cobra pelo chão  
As pessoas que nela vão passando  
Acreditam nas coisas lá do céu  
As mulheres cantando tiram versos  
Os homens escutando tiram o chapéu  
Eles vivem pensando aqui na Terra  
Esperando o que Jesus prometeu [...]

The lovely instrumental waltz "Laurence" follows, in a lyrical arrangement by Theo de Barros. Harvey Winnapel's solo clarinet states the melody for the first time, to be joined by string quartet, guitar, two flutes (Léa Freire & Teco Cardoso), horn (Mário Rocha), and acoustic bass (Tibô Delor).

The tune harks back to the pastoral world of Impressionism, evoking images of sun-dappled, flower-strewn meadows.

In "Aqui, Ó!," the song's composer Toninho Horta lends his legendary guitar to the track and even sings backup. Filó is on electric guitar, and the two strum energetically and harmonize vocally, relishing the affair and ending on a peal of laughter:

Oh! Minas Gerais  
Um caminhão  
Guarda quem ficou  
Com vinte anos ou mais

Eu iria a pé  
Oh, meu amor  
Eu iria até, meu pai  
Sem um tostão

Em Minas Gerais, alegria é  
Guardada em cofres, catedrais

Na varanda vejo o meu amor  
Tem benção de Deus

Todo aquele que trabalha no escritório  
 Bendito é o fruto  
 Bendito é o fruto  
 Bendito é o fruto dessas Minas Gerais  
 Minas Gerais, Minas Gerais

“Fada” (Fairy) is another slower wordless tune entrusted to Theo de Barros’ arrangement. Filó’s gentle vocalese and guitar are echoed by Léa Freire and Teco Cardoso’s muted flutes.

Theo de Barros wrote “Menino das Laranjas,” about the boy who sells oranges at the street market. It’s a rapid samba that Filó uses as a platform for his vocal improvisations.

As in “Procissão,” his only accompanying instrument is a guitar (in fact, there are no percussion instruments on this disc), but Filó squeezes maximum percussive effects from both voice and guitar.

Menino que vai pra feira  
 Vender sua laranja até se acabar  
 Filho de mãe solteira  
 Cuja ignorância tem que sustentar  
 É madrugada, vai sentindo frio  
 Porque se o cesto não voltar vazio  
 A mão arranja um outro pra laranja  
 E esse filho vai ter que apanhar

Compra laranja, doutor  
 Ainda dou uma de quebra pro senhor  
 Compra laranja, laranja, laranja, doutor  
 Ainda dou uma de quebra pro senhor [...]

Filó composed “Tema pro Macumbinha” in the late 1970s as a tribute to the gifted young São Paulo guitarist Macumbinha (1951–1977), who died with his family as a result of a gas leak in their apartment.

This long track opens with a free tenor sax riff by Vinícius Dorin. Eventually he receives a rhythmic boost from Filó’s electric guitar and Arismar do Espírito Santo’s 7-string guitar. The theme is another venue for Filó’s high-energy vocalizing.

Toninho Horta and his guitar return to accompany Filó’s singing in “Pedra da Lua,” a poetic rumination that begins dreamily but picks up tempo and lapses into scat before subsiding into conclusion:

Dia, mania  
 Tarde covarde, noite açoite  
 Minha mãe calma e serena  
 Com seu sorriso inseguro  
 Toda vestida de branco  
 Hoje parece mentira  
 Hoje parece verdade  
 Menino levante cedo  
 Menino não chegue tarde [...]

Another voice-guitar rendition is “Notícias do Brasil” (Os pássaros trazem) by Milton Nascimento and Fernando Brant, through which Filó races at breakneck speed.

The news carried by the birds from Fortaleza, Recife, Natal, and other points north is that Brazil is more than its coastal cities. Throughout the country lives a people that deserves more respect:

[...] O canto mais belo será sempre o mais sincero  
 Salve tudo quanto é belo será sempre de espantar  
 Aqui vive um povo que cultiva a qualidade  
 Ser mais sábio do quem eu quer governar

A novidade é que o Brasil não é só litoral  
 É muito mais, é muito mais que qualquer zona sul  
 Tem gente boa espalhada por esse Brasil

Que vai fazer desse lugar um bom país [...]

“Pro Felipe,” composed in the studio for Filó’s grandson, is a jazzy flight for voice, electric guitar (Filó), and bass (the latter wielded by Thiago do Espirito Santo).

While the bass carries the melody and lead improvisation, the guitar responds in freeform, clipped harmony. Theo de Barros arranged Léa Freire & Joyce’s “Samba de Mulher” for electric guitar (Filó), 7-string guitar (Arismar do Espirito Santo), and flutes (Léa Freire and Teco Cardoso).

With Filó’s voice acting as a horn and percussion provided by beating on guitars, the effect is one of a complete band.

[...] Mulher que é mulher consola  
 Mulher que é mulher descola  
 Parece que deita e rola  
 Mas quando não se controla  
 Levanta a cabeça e chora  
 Que bom que mulher pode chorar

The final three tracks are all voice-electric guitar solos in which Filó gives free rein to vocal improvising. “Jazz de Senzala” and “Here Is That Rainy Day” are dished out in vocalese (the latter in an 8-minute marathon).

The lyrics of “É Difícil Perdoar” lend themselves to a lullaby, but Filó gives it the full rhythmic treatment:

Vou cantar bem baixinho pra você ouvir  
 A canção que eu fiz é pra ninar  
 Moça bonita, eu sei  
 Que pouco amor lhe dei  
 É difícil perdoar [...]

Jazz de Senzala is a cohesive and dense work that demands repeated attention to savor fully. The rewards are considerable. Listen to five audio samples on the Maritaca website.

Filó Machado: Jazz de Senzala  
 (Maritaca M 1007; 2003) 62:55 min.

Produced by Léa Freire  
 Arranged by Filó Machado & Theo de Barros

01. Procissão (Gilberto Gil)
02. Laurence (Filó Machado)
03. Aqui, Ó! (Toninho Horta/Fernando Brant)
04. Fada (Filó Machado)
05. Menino das Laranjas (Theo de Barros)
06. Tema pro Macumbinha (Filó Machado)
07. Pedra da Lua (Toninho Horta/Cacaso)
08. Notícias do Brasil (Milton Nascimento/Fernando Brant)
09. Pro Felipe (Filó Machado)
10. Samba de Mulher (Léa Freire/Joyce)
11. Jazz de Senzala (Filó Machado)
12. É Difícil Perdoar (Filó Machado)
13. Here Is That Rainy Day (Jimmy Van Heusen/Johnny Burke)

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