

Brazil Salmaso's Eloquent Simplicity

Contributed by Bruce Gilman
Thursday, 11 November 2004

An interpreter whose air of intimacy, unmatched timbre, and unique sense of phrasing entices listeners beyond the lissome dancing beauty of her voice, engaging them like privileged guests, Monica Salmaso returns after a four year recording hiatus.

Surrounded by a fine company of musicians, Salmaso has, once again, brought her fans music from composers with a personal vision, whose relationship to Brazilian Popular Music has been essentially poetic.

The repertoire moves from Tom Jobim through Tom Zé by way of, among others, Dorival Caymmi, Sílvia Caldas, and Chico Buarque; from modern to traditional, from the interior of Brazil to the metropolis, arranged side by side, Salmaso's fourth solo CD and her first for the Biscoito Fino label, *Iaiá*, verifies that differences can live in harmony.

Many of the tunes on *Iaiá*, are from *Ponto in Comum*, a series of eight concerts Salmaso produced in São Paulo during 2002 and 2003 in which select jazz, choro, and samba artists performed original compositions.

The CD's title, a word once used by slaves to address young women, is an homage to Clementina de Jesus, the samba singer from Rio de Janeiro, who made her professional debut at 63 after decades of working as maid.

Rio's samba permeates the entire disc and is definitively stated on the opening track, the partido-alto "Moro na Roça" (I Live in the Country), a theme from folklore made popular by Clementina de Jesus.

The second track, "Cabrochinha" (Mulatto Girl) is a samba-choro featuring Luciana Rabello's stylistic cavaquinho and the florid, headlong, and unfailingly inventive clarinet playing of Nailor "Proveta" Azevedo.

Salmaso, swimming a deep emotional current, demonstrates maturity and confidence in the restraint with which she approaches "Estrela de Oxum" (Star of Oxum), a toada, that is, a stanza-and-refrain song with romantic lyrics, about a girl who goes out to the forest and has a vision of Oxum, the Afro-Brazilian deity who rules the river waters.

Written by Rodolfo Stroeter and singer/songwriter Joyce, the tune is deliciously delivered by Paulo Bellinati, guitar; Teco Cardoso, bass flute; Stroeter, bass; and Robertinho Silva, percussion.

On "Menina Amanhã de Manhã" (Tomorrow Morning Girl) from the experimental Tom Zé's album *Se o Caso é Chorar* (1972), Salmaso negotiates subtle timbral inflections and abrupt intervallic leaps with equal facility.

And pianist Benjamim Taubkin's chamber music-like arrangement for this track is well suited to the superbly cohesive supporting unit that includes Teco Cardoso on flute and Toninho Ferragutti on accordion, two musicians whose approach and brilliant technique disdain stylistic barriers.

Giving full respect to Tom Jobim and Vinicius de Moraes, Paulo Bellinati's arrangement for "Por Toda a Minha Vida" (For All My Life), takes a tune immortalized on Elis and Tom in 1974 and opens its seams to rework the lyrical aesthetics.

On Bellinati's arrangement for "Assum Branco" (White Assum), a tribute to Luiz Gonzaga, cellist Lui Coimbra is intense and expressive. Salmaso's insinuating warmth and easy delivery gives her a wonderful, understated intimacy, demonstrating just how subtle yet dynamic an interpreter she is on an astonishingly wide range of material.

Featured on the comic and syncopated samba de gafieira "Cidade Lagoa" (Lagoon City) is a sophisticated arrangement for a woodwind quintet (three clarinets and two bass clarinets) whose name Quinteto Sujeito a Guincho comes from the

expression, "If you park here, you'll be towed."

"Doce na Feira" (Sweets in the Street Market) is an arresting samba-maxixe with a clever intertwining of motifs and patterns among the trio members—André Mehmari, piano; Teco Cardoso, flute; and Ari Colares, percussion—who play as one, moving to each cadence and inflection with a perfectly realized integration.

Salmaso's innate musicality allows her to add small variations to a song that tells of an unfaithful woman selling candy at a fair who falls in love with a samba musician, then offers the candy to everyone.

Salmaso is also accompanied by Mehmari on "Sinhasinha" (Little Lady), Chico Buarque's ironic tune about an upper class woman who lives a very superficial life and is told by her maid, an older black woman, that is time to wake up! (acordar) to real life.

Mehmari's phenomenal technique, atonal layering, and motivic development are articulated with a great delicacy of touch, anticipating Salmaso's every intention, answering musical questions before they have even been asked.

Salmaso's voice continues to be a source of wonder on "É Doce Morrer no Mar" (To Die in the Sea is Sweet) by Dorival Caymmi, and Teco Cardoso is stirring as he captures Bachianas Brasileiras No. 5 by Villa-Lobos amid his baritone sax solo.

Closing the musical theme is the partido-alto "Na Aldeia" (In the Village), which Sílvio Caldas recorded in 1933. Both the duet with Teresa Cristina and the band's unflinching lyricism make it clear that these musicians clearly believe in the strength of song, that this is a celebration of what can be achieved in the coming together of imagination and refined technique.

What stands out in Salmaso's approach and bonds her to these musicians, evocative pieces, and venerated composers is the fluidity of her expression, coupled with a dynamic use of space, a clear strand of intelligence, and an overall feel springing from her maturity as a singer who is utterly prepared for the leap into the unknown, which the poetic act demands.

Salmaso's interest in people, religion, humor, poetry, and Brazilian culture, apparent on Afro-Sambas (1995), Trampolim (1998), and Voadeira (1999); is evoked anew on *Iaiá*.

Artist: Monica Salmaso
Title: *Iaiá*
Label: Biscoito Fino (BF559)
Date: 2004

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