

Brazil's Jedi Return

Contributed by Bruce Gilman
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When Hermeto Pascoal played Los Angeles in 2004, I was curious to hear live the woodwind player he had chosen to fill the rather large shoes left empty by Carlos Malta. I was stunned by the musician's melodic inventiveness and furious, unsentimental sound. His enormous instrumental technique, allied to a most fertile imagination, raised emotional temperatures.

There was a distinctive quality, a vivid confrontation between the seductive and the aggressive, in Vinicius Dorin's improvisations that hinted at the power and authority documented on *Revoada*, his landmark exploit as a group leader.

Prior to joining Hermeto's group, the multi-instrumentalist and composer had already built a reputation for himself both as a professor at Centro Livre de Aprendizagem Musical, or CLAM (Free Center of Musical Learning), and as a performer with, among others, Johnny Alf, Gal Costa, Simone, Jane Duboc, and Banda Mantiqueira.

Now at last Dorin is able to present his music in a comprehensive manner while branching out into fresh directions. Not only are there headlong assaults at fast odd-metered tempos and graceful insinuating, incantatory melodies, but also tender, moving ballads. All twelve tunes, nine written by Dorin, have a muscular feel to them and are well suited to the musicians involved.

"Cincando" is a samba whose barlines become incidental by-products of its 5/4 foundation. It features Dorin's soprano sax cascading a series of motive blocks connected by dazzling streaks of scalar lightning. The rhythm section is faithfully guided by Enéias Xavier's bass and the light-fingered logic of Írio Jr. on electric piano while drummer Nenê's off-center rhythmical shifts and oblique snare accents add a dramatic polyrhythmic base.

From a shapely unaccompanied introduction, through its spare, yet telling solos, Dorin's "Balada em Sol para Si," brings a wide spectrum of subtle color. His asymmetrical alto sax phrasing and uninhibited improvisational flight make for intoxicating listening.

The title track, "Revoada," is a solo piano reduction of a piece Dorin originally composed for the orchestra at Conservatório de Tatuí. Inspired by the guarânia rhythm that originated in Paraguay and Bolivia, arriving in Brazil through states that border these countries (Mato Grosso, Mato Grosso do Sul, and Paraná), it is a ternary form combining lithe elegance with technical finish and poetic allure.

The buoyantly inventive choro "Gota Serena" was composed during a rehearsal with Hermeto Pascoal's group. Its theme, developing with stunning variation, features the quicksilver flights of Dorin's flute and the infectious freshness of Hermeto's pianist, André Marques.

There is a moment of relative serenity on "Estrela do Pôr-do-Sol," a gorgeously sensual ballad reading on which multi-tracking allows Dorin to play both piano and tenor sax. "Caminho Verde" is profoundly rooted in the swirling matrix of samba rhythm created by ensemble intersections.

High-voltage soloists and a taut rhythm section spawn solos that spontaneously combust into compelling tapestries of technique and passion. Loose and spacious, Baden Powell's "Violão Vadio" shows Dorin luxuriating back to the tone and temperament of Ben Webster. Here Dorin's insinuating, incantatory feeling is offset by the elegant guitar playing of Arismar do Espírito Santo--tremendously moving.

"Guaramiranga" combines maracatu rhythms with precision, drive, and dynamism. The piano solo by Írio Jr. burns nonstop; Dorin's solo, demonstrating a sense of timing that pays scant attention to normal bar division, is punctuated by the pianist's percussive jabs. The utterly distinctive "Serpente" by André Marques is particularly suitable for the keening melodicism through which Dorin's soprano sax slithers.

"Maracatudo" captures a five-way musical empathy that is little short of miraculous. Guitar and soprano sax deliver the melody before imaginative solos dovetail from piano to bass to guitar to soprano sax to drums over a maracatu groove. Dorin himself, ceaselessly pushing at the boundaries of the possible, imbues every note with an extraordinary amalgam of wit and energy.

The spirit of John Coltrane looms large on the up-tempo "Escadaria." Built on the harmonic structure of "Giant Steps," it features solos of soaring virtuosity, of mind-bending ferocity whipping up a firestorm of excitement. Hermeto Pascoal wrote "Viniciando" in the studio as an homage to his disciple.

The tune spotlights an abridged version of O Grupo: Hermeto on piano and percussion; Dorin on baritone, alto, and soprano saxes as well as flute and piccolo; and André Marques on piano. Each negotiates his own ideas, reacting in his own way to the challenges thrown down by the maestro. The lucid propulsion, complex texture, and pointillistic interplay invests each strain with organic and inspiring musical ideas.

Intense and precise, Dorin's compositions and improvisations bring a succinct and forceful style to Brazilian jazz. The projection of individual passion is undeniable, but cannot disguise the fact that Dorin's music is well prepared. He interacts consistently with his powerful group and, although inevitably the focal point, does not insist on total domination.

This is genuinely challenging music melding together incisive rhythmic force and scintillating ensemble color. Each track is a series of fleeting exchanges, tempos, and moods that will continue to provoke and inspire ears of disparate persuasions. Revoada is a fascinating synthesis of many contemporary musical developments and an important step forward for Vinicius Dorin.

Journalist, musician, and educator Bruce Gilman has served as music editor of Brazzil magazine, an international monthly publication based in Los Angeles, for close to a decade. During that time he has written scores of articles on the most influential Brazilian artists and genres, program notes for festivals in the United States and abroad, numerous CD liner notes, and an essay, "The Politics of Samba," that appeared in the Georgetown Journal.

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