
Brazil's Bethânia From Counterculture Diva to Ballads's Queen

Contributed by Clara Angelica Porto
Thursday, 22 February 2007

For 15 years Georges Gachot has been making documentaries about classical music. Then in 1976 he saw Brazilian singer Maria Bethânia in Montreux, at the Jazz Festival. He knew no Brazilian music at the time, but was taken aback by the surprise and fell in love with Bethânia's singing.

Eight years later, he sent her a tape on Martha Argerich Argah, a classical pianist. Bethânia loved what she saw. That was the first movement towards the film. Maria Bethânia: Music is Perfume concentrates on the music and the sparkling moment that gives birth to music and also the singer's deep feelings as an interpreter, as well as her selection of the repertoire, how she gets there.

According to Gachot, the documentary is not a documentary, but a film of music, with strong sound, but more than a show. Even though the film is intertwined with stories, it never breaks the music. Caetano Veloso, Maria Bethânia's brother, said the soundtrack of the film is one of the best he ever saw.

The film has been launched in France, Spain, Holland, Belgium, Austria, Switzerland, festivals all around and won a prize in Rome in September of 2006 as Best Film of Music and Best Soundtrack. It has been seen by over 100,000 people all over, an excellent number for a music film. Lately New York-based ArtMattan Productions, an independent film distributor, which "distributes films that focus on the human experience of black people" bought the rights of Maria Bethânia: Music is Perfume.

Narrated by Bethânia herself, the film not only gives us an insight into the intimate sphere of Maria Bethânia's creative process, but focuses on the history of Brazilian music. First a muse of the so-called counterculture, and then the queen of romantic ballads, Maria Bethânia chronicles her musical life experience in relation to Brazilian society's development.

In addition to this, filmmaker Gachot gathers together a fantastic ensemble of contributors including Gilberto Gil, Nana Caymmi, Miúcha, Chico Buarque and Caetano Veloso, all of them witnesses and participants to some of the greatest music history of our time.

Tim Maia Reaches America

The late Tim Maia had a dream he did not have a chance to fulfill: he wanted to make a CD in the US. No one would be more appropriate for the American taste than Tim, Brazil's very expression of soul music, in fact, its unquestionable father.

It did not happen while Tim was alive, but it is happening now. Luaka Bop, David Byrne's record company that has launched the work of Tom Zé and other modern expressions of Brazilian music, is producing a luxury compilation of Tim's work, with half of the songs in English. Nelson Motta is writing the presentation for the CD.

Tim Maia, born Sebastião Rodrigues Maia in Rio de Janeiro, (1942 - 1998) was probably the most polemic, outspoken and high spirited name of Brazilian music. He was known for missing appointments, even big-time gigs, and was often boycotted by major TV networks and recording companies, which just did not want to take chances with him.

Disturbing, maybe, but Tim was adored by millions of Brazilians and with no exception by all other artists. Tim's potent and flexible baritone made everybody who listened to him feel right.

Everything was big about Tim, his body, his voice and the energy that came from him. His singing spread happiness and few artists have been so inspiring. David Byrne, once again, goes fishing for talent and good work in Brazil, and catches pure gold to spread around. Well done.

2 Brazilians at Carnegie Hall

Gilberto Gil, 63, is today Brazil's Minister of Culture. In the middle 60s together with Caetano Veloso, Gil founded the Tropicalismo.

With time, Gil became more involved with politics and was elected Alderman, then became the President of the City of Salvador's Cultural Foundation. Since 2003 he has been part of President Lula's administration.

One of the best Brazilian musicians ever, Gilberto Gil will be singing at Carnegie's Stern Auditorium, Perelman Stage, on Tuesday, March 20, 2007 at 8 pm.

Three-time Grammy nominee Luciana Souza hails from São Paulo, Brazil, where she grew up in a family of musicians. She began her recording career at age three with a radio commercial, and recorded more than 200 jingles and soundtracks, becoming a first-call studio veteran by age 16.

She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Jazz Composition from Berklee College Music, and a Master's Degree in Jazz Studies from New England Conservatory.

Luciana Souza will be singing with the Los Angeles Guitar Quartet at Carnegie Hall's Zankel Hall on Wednesday, March 28, 2007 at 7:30 pm.

Clara Angelica Porto is a Brazilian bilingual journalist living in New York. She went to school in Brazil and at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. Clara is presently working as the English writer for The Brasilians, a monthly newspaper in Manhattan. Comments welcome at clara.angelica@gmail.com.