
Brazil Sound: Peripatetic Wind-player Wainapel Hands in a Potent Instrumental Mix

Contributed by Bruce Gilman
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Harvey Wainapel straddles the worlds of both jazz and Brazilian music with commanding authority, regardless of the performance context. Known for his prowess on clarinet, soprano, alto, and tenor saxophones, Wainapel's elegance of tone, appreciation of nuance, and subtleties of time are rare among woodwind practitioners. Drawing from a wide range of influences, Wainapel's latest CD, *Amigos Brasileiros*, showcases the infectious zest of congenial musicians reacting to one another throughout an auspicious program.

A product of New York's "Borscht Belt," Wainapel boasts a most impressive résumé. He studied at the prestigious Berklee College of Music in Boston and worked extensively with Kenny Barron, Ray Charles, and Joe Lovano. Thoroughly experienced in the jazz tradition, he maintains a busy and diverse career, but his desire to find new creative outlets, has led him to the warmth and extroverted emotion of Brazilian music and to his working with, among others, André Mehmari, Filó Machado, Marco Pereira, Itiberê Zwarg, Sérgio Santos, Teco Cardoso, and Guinga.

Amigos Brasileiros, beautifully recorded and balanced, perfectly captures these musicians' electricity. Heard in top form, all make strong contributions. There is a wholesome interchange and dialogue between all the players involved. Their elation is imposing, and Wainapel himself never sounds anything less than completely engaged in what he plays.

With two percussionists providing a rhythmic torrent, and the cumulative power of Wainapel's intense and readily identifiable clarinet, the opening samba, Marco Pereira's "Sambadalu," is forceful and determined. The interplay between Wainapel and Pereira, a display of superior artistry, reveals Pereira's technical powers: his masterly shaping of notes, his faultless fingering, and his immense chordal vocabulary.

Integrating an African-based 5/4 feel with a Brazilian samba, "Dando Risada" by Sérgio Santos is a striking exploration of oblique phrasing and emotional balance. Soaring over a swirl of glass marimba, guitar, talking drum, and electric bass, Wainapel, overdubbing to dialogue with himself on soprano sax, creates a soundworld of crystalline beauty.

On "A Toada," Wainapel's clarinet avoids lengthy forays into the instrument's upper register, thus producing a honeyed, tender tone. Unusual instrumentation and ensemble interplay offer fresh color with Guello on percussion, as always, exemplary, and a string quartet bringing chamber music delicacy and improvisational edge to the predominant baião spirit.

Although relying on well-used paths that now sound quaintly dated, the funky samba "Procurando um Caminho" packs a tremendous punch and shows off a very tight quartet. The alto sax and guitar solo work, creating a superb feeling of momentum, is fiery, exciting, and completely compatible with this stylistically unexceptional tune.

"Pixinguinha," with its wordplay on the names Pixinguinha and Guinga, is tailor-made for the twists and transformations of Claudia Villela's wordless vocals. Wainapel's intricate clarinet is fully integrated and sustained by Ricardo Peixoto's

guitar contributing interdependent lines of complexity and élan. His unflagging, inventive flow and sensitivity to shading and dynamics furnish an indivisible palette of instrumental texture. At heart Peixoto is a romantic whose medium is music that breathes deeply, is full of light, space, and grace.

Filó Machado's "Baião do Porão" is the CD's one undeniable classic, an exhilarating, headlong affair that features a 5/8 meter alternating with the familiar 2/4 baião feel. Wainapel, largely faithful to the tune's contours, molds mercurial soprano sax lines as the ensemble's hand-in-glove interplay, especially the rich percussive presence of Caito Marcondes, furnishes the broad seam of lyricism running through the music with a maturity of phrasing and expression that allows listeners to savor the tune's architecturally tough-minded elegance.

The choro "Sempre Voltando" introduces newcomers to Wainapel as a composer, one who knows how to balance his writing between the search for melodic freedom and a loyalty to the structural limits, the harmonic vocabulary, stylistic axis, chromatic paths, and devious harmonic turns of Brazil's choro tradition. Here Edmilson Capelupi's powerful pulse and judicious note-choices on 7-string guitar leave Guello free to react dynamically to Edson Alves, generating harmonic and kinetic energy on 6-string guitar, while Amaldinho do Cavaco on cavaquinho delivers an unending font of ideas.

Although it is primarily a marcha-rancho, the other Wainapel original on this CD, "A Garota da Garoa," is introduced by an ijexá rhythm and is interpreted freely by an impeccable quartet: Nelson Ayres on piano, Nenê on drums, Wainapel on soprano sax, and the impressive fluency and broad expressive range of multi-reedman Teco Cardoso on baritone sax, an early and continuing influence on Wainapel and to whom the piece is dedicated.

"Nem Mais um Pio," the toada that inaugurated Guinga's partnership with poet Sérgio Natureza (recorded on Cine Baronesa), is especially moving and possibly Guinga's loveliest composition. Its serenity and the textural nuances behind the melodic variation do much to illustrate and underline its trance-ambient glow. The harmonic paths followed by Guinga's voice, Wainapel's tenor sax, and the two guitars, imbue intriguing tensions and give the music its often startling identity.

"Árvore de Maçã" was written by Itiberê Zwarg, the bass player/composer who has worked with Hermeto Pascoal for over thirty years and whose Itiberê Orquestra Família is based on Hermeto's (Escola Jabour) model. This group of comparative youngsters--eleven of whom are heard here--learned music in an unconventional manner, through intuition and natural principals, something Itiberê calls Corpo Presente.

Ethnomusicologist Dr. Andrew Connell explains, "Corpo presente means 'body present.' In other words, Itiberê composes with the entire band present rather than writing in private and then bringing in all the parts and rehearsing them. Instead, the processes of writing, arranging, and rehearsing are combined and performed simultaneously."

Featuring fine solo work from Zwarg and Wainapel, "Árvore de Maçã" was created at a single five-hour rehearsal and is a good example of a stimulated collection of soloists with enormous technical facility seizing a recording opportunity with relish and abundant imagination. Their delight in new sonorities, conveyed with exemplary precision, makes this the preeminent track on this CD.

"Vivo Entre Valsas" is, as André Mehmari alludes to in his title, a fast (vivo) section cradled between two lyrical waltzes, in typically nostalgic valsa brasileira fashion. Says Mehmari, "The idea was to create contrasting sections within a unified composition." Composed during a burst of nostalgia for his native land during his stay in Boston, this piano and clarinet duet, with its winning blend of buoyant rhythm and shapely melody, is a color-sensitive performance of character and instrumental virtuosity.

There is much to listen for and to hear on this CD: the variety of forms and unusual timbral palettes, the meters, timing, and moving solos, the varying instrumentation, the arrangements that show much craftsmanship in their planning and execution. Providing a fascinating journey through the symmetry and asymmetry of an exotic and expressive music, Amigos Brasileiros is a miraculously empathetic aural collage about research, invention, tradition, collaboration, and above all, play.

Journalist, musician, and educator Bruce Gilman has served as music editor of Brazzil magazine, an online international publication based in Los Angeles, for more than 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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