

An Array of Brazilian Sounds

Six albums of Brazilian jazz and *música popular brasileira* illustrate more than the country's musical diversity: They demonstrate how Brazil's best songwriters and musicians—marinated in older forms like samba, choro and bossa nova—are finding new ways to use that heritage to create fresh pop, rock and jazz.

You could think of the virtuosic 11-member **Banda Black Rio** as the Earth Wind & Fire of Brazil, but that still wouldn't cover its deep Brazilian influences and occasional Weather Report-like excursions into fusion. Now, in its second generation under the leadership of pianist/composer William Magalhães, son of founding member Oberdan Magalhães, the music blends Rio's samba dancehall tradition with the grooves of '70s-era American funk and r&b, smartly updating its sound with nods to hip-hop. The ambitious ***O Som Das Américas (The Sound Of The Americas)*** (Universal Music 0602577310508; 72:25 ★★★★★) includes guest appearances by Caetano Veloso, Elza Soares, and most memorably, Gilberto Gil, singing the mesmerizing "Irerê" with Magalhães.

Ordering info: universalmusic.com.br

Firmly in the jazz category is the latest from pianist/bandleader **Antonio Adolfo**, ***Samba Jazz Alley*** (AAM 0713; 48:13 ★★★★★½). Rio native Adolfo had his first hit at the age of 21 with his song "Pretty World" (known in Brazil as "Sá Marina"); it was covered by everyone from Sergio Mendes to Stevie Wonder. Since then, he's led the septet that bears his name and includes several of Brazil's top musicians, including trumpeter Jessé Sadoc, saxophonist Marcelo Martins, and the killer rhythm section of bassist Jorge Helder and drummer Rafael Barata. The program, dedicated to the memory of Rio's legendary Bottle Alley, where Adolfo and others invented "samba jazz" in the 1960s, is grade-A Adolfo. A highlight is "Hello, Herbie," clearly inspired by "Cantaloupe Island," which pays a tropical tribute to the great Hancock.

Ordering info: aammusic.com

John Finbury, the only American in this bunch, is a Massachusetts-based pianist and songwriter who caused something of a stir in 2016 when a song of his was nominated for a Latin Grammy. His new recording, ***Sorte!*** (Greenflash; 28:46 ★★★★★½), is a collaboration with Brazilian actress-singer **Thalma De Freitas**, who wrote the Portuguese lyrics. This is sophisticated Brazilian-style chamber jazz, played to the hilt by a group of mostly Brazilian all-stars, including guitarist Chico Pinheiro, bassist John Patitucci, drummer Duduka Da Fonseca, pianist Victor Gonçalves, and percussionists Airto Moreira and Rogerio Boccato.

Ordering info: greenflashmusic.com

The debut album from 33-year-old jazz violinist **Guilherme Pimenta**, who came to Rio



Delia Fischer

from Minas Gerais, clearly marks him as a talent to watch, with a striking command of choro, samba and forró styles. In arrangements for his quartet (with guitar, string bass and drums/percussion) on ***Catopé*** (Self Release, 43:36 ★★★★★), he mixes those traditional styles with jazz in virtuosic fashion amid a bracing set of nine originals.

Ordering info: guilhermepimenta.com

Marcos Valle, known as the original Brazilian beach boy, has been making hits from his home base near Copacabana for about 50 years, ever since he wrote the bossa standard "Summer Samba (So Nice)." He long ago morphed, however, from a young bossa nova composer to a master of Carioca jazz-funk. The opening track on ***Sempre*** (Far Out 211; 65:56 ★★★★★½), "Olha Quem Ta Chegando (Look Who's Coming)," is Rio club music of a rarefied quality, made even more compelling by Valle's grooves on Rhodes. The track is irresistible, even if the rest of the album is slightly less memorable.

Ordering info: faroutrecordings.com

Let's save the best for last: Singer, pianist and arranger **Delia Fischer**, who has worked with Milton Nascimento, Toninho Horta and other Brazilian greats, proves herself an innovative composer/lyricist of Brazilian pop with ***Tempo Mínimo (Labidad/Nomad)*** (41:11 ★★★★★). The album took eight years to make—and it shows. The 12 songs, all keepers, are crafted with irresistible melodies and poetic lyrics about time, love and the search for meaning in an era of splendid digital isolation. Fischer's limpid, understated voice somehow embodies both innocence and experience. The arrangements make creative use of flutes, clarinets, strings and electronica, blending Brazilian, jazz, pop and classical elements to make something sui generis. Guests include MPB star Ed Motta and Valle, who wrote the only cover, a duet with Fischer of his song "Garra" that should be a hit all over again. **DB**

Ordering info: deliafischer.com.br



Jon Irabagon *Invisible Horizon*

IRABBAGAST 014/015

★★★★½

As far as tabletop games go, the ancient Chinese mahjong is one of the most fiendishly difficult and intricate. Made up of 144 tiles based on Chinese characters and symbols, it's a pastime that can take a lifetime to master. It feels apt then that saxophonist Jon Irabagon takes mahjong as his inspiration for the double record *Invisible Horizon*. Basing the eight compositions of the first half, *Invisible Guests*, around the mechanics of a mahjong game, his saxophone meanders through atonal classical melodies, stark ambience and bursts of luscious strings—each motif unfolding as a tile overturned.

Birdsong and droning strings herald the cinematic opening of "Vignette For Mouthpieceless Soprano Saxophone And String Quartet" with the faint sound of Irabagon's breath passing through his saxophone as a reminder of his presence. There is the sense of a meltdown in many of these compositions, the arrangements verging on the precipice of falling apart, before being pulled back by dynamic shifts. Similarly, on the second half of the release, *Dark Horizon: Live From The Mausoleum*, Irabagon mingles frenetic solo saxophone with the oneiric reverb of an Oslo crypt, where he recorded. Breath mingles with the echo of its own making, just as the string quartet on *Invisible Guests* provides a response to the piano's rhythm. It's as much a field recording of the room and experiment in Irabagon's force as it is a cohesive record. Ultimately, though, *Invisible Horizon* is a difficult listen, one that could benefit from a greater sense of structure. Yet, Irabagon's playing is captivating once you allow yourself into the looping ebb and flow of textures he creates.

—Ammar Kalia

Invisible Horizon: Disc one: Vignette For Mouthpieceless Soprano Saxophone And String Quartet; Invisible Guests I-VI; Vignette For Soprano Saxophone And String Quartet. Disc two: Dark Horizon (Entrance); Dragonwort; Forest & Field; Holy Smoke; Good Old Days (Theme From The Little Rascals); Eternal Rest; Half A World Away; Dark Horizon (Exit Bow). (57:11/38:17)

Personnel: Jon Irabagon, soprano saxophone, mezzo soprano saxophone; Matt Mitchell (Disc one), piano; Mivos Quartet (Disc one), strings.

Ordering info: jonirabagon.bandcamp.com