

MICHEL NIRENBERG

RETRATO/PORTRAIT

By Ken Avis

Michel Nirenberg set out on this debut recording to build bridges between Brazilian contemporary music and American jazz. The bridge he's built will stand the test of time and bear repeated crossing. Exquisite execution and virtuoso performances underpin a well-curated selection of music which, true to the best principles of Brazilian composition, at no point requires you to form a search party to go out looking for the melody.

Nirenberg comes from a musical family in Rio de Janeiro where he made a name for himself at festivals and in competitions before moving to the DC area in 2012 to study for his graduate degree in music. Michel is a welcome addition on the basis of this recording. The DC-Baltimore area enjoys many fine performances of Brazilian style jazz from a deep roster of musicians.

From the first beat, Nirenberg comes out swinging with the powerful opener "Chorinho em Aldeia / Na Glória." Clarinetist Severino Araújo wrote the first tune. Na Glória was penned by trombonist Raul de Barros with Ari dos Santos. This combination of compositions from three of Brazil's brightest musicians, activates your shoulders and hips, refusing to let you sit still. The vibrant, swirling sounds of carnival sweep up the listener with an open-hearted invitation to dance. Nirenberg's collaborators, including the rhythm section of the Lucini brothers (Leonardo, bass; Alejandro, drums), and on later tracks percussionist Bruno Lucini, breeze through the track with virtuosity and verve, imparting an irresistible energy to each heady chorus.

Those familiar with Brazil's classic styles of choro and samba will be delighted by this performance. Those less familiar may be surprised at the music's appeal. The music paralleled the development of jazz in the USA—small group, folkloric, acoustic music gave way to increasing levels of improvisation, moving to sophisticated orchestral arrangements. Perhaps this is why the music appeals so much to jazz listeners. At their best, both styles of music invite you to listen and move.

In his next tune, "À Deux," Nirenberg explores American jazz styling. He takes the scenic route to get there by introducing the tune with a tango which slides seamlessly into an atmospheric 1940s film noir-style piece featuring pianist Alex Brown. Throughout the album Nirenberg's original compositions sit well alongside the canon of Brazilian music and with jazz gems such as Duke Ellington and Juan Tizol's "Caravan," interpreted with an appealing loping style which suits the mood of the album perfectly.

CD REVIEW

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His composition "Forró From the South" adopts the insistent rhythm of northeast Brazil's signature music, continuing to keep the listener engaged at the level of the head and the hips. The track features Argentinian guitarist Danny Corteza and Bruno Lucini on percussion.

An album highlight is Nirenberg's solo saxophone performance of the intricate "Desvairada." Composed by one of Brazil's noted and influential guitarists, Anibal Augusto Sardinha, better known as "Garoto", the piece typically is performed on guitar, with a cascade of classical-style guitar arpeggios. Garoto spent time in the USA in the late 1950s performing with Carmen Miranda. Duke Ellington and Art Tatum were regular audience members at his shows, such was the sophistication of his music. Nirenberg matches the speed, dexterity and melodiousness of the original. Where he finds time to breathe is a mystery!

"Samba da Virgínia" features a regular visitor to DC, Brazilian seven-string guitarist Rogério Souza, a player well worth catching when he will next be in town during September. Nirenberg also features Jacob do Bandolim on the choro "Santa Morena."

With a multi-instrumentalist classical background and influences which range from the Brazilian styles of Baden Powell and jazz through the Beatles to an enduring appreciation of Led Zeppelin, it's little surprise that Nirenberg brings melody, rhythm and diversity to his debut album...a dazzling delight from beginning to end.

Michel Nirenberg's next performance in Baltimore is scheduled for January 30, 2016 at An Die Musik. Check out his music and find additional information at <http://michelnirenberg.com>

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