

INTERVIEWS

Inside Maracanós: Ricardo Bacelar on Friendship, Freedom and Brazilian Identity



Published 1 month ago on May 16, 2026
By Danilo Navas



Ricardo Bacelar and Aírto Moreira - Photo credit: Maria Bacelar

Brazilian pianist, composer and producer Ricardo Bacelar opens up about *Maracanós*, his ambitious new collaboration with legendary percussionist Aírto Moreira and special guest Flora Purim.

In this exclusive interview, Bacelar reflects on how the album emerged organically during the filming of a documentary at Jasmin Music's studio in Fortaleza (the capital of Ceará, a state located in northeastern Brazil), where creativity flowed through improvisation, friendship and artistic trust. He discusses building what he calls "a film without images," blending Brazilian rhythms, orchestral textures, electronics and spontaneous musical interaction.

Bacelar also speaks about Aírto's enduring legacy, Flora's spiritual vocal presence, the symbolism behind the album title, and why protecting artistic freedom in an algorithm-driven music industry remains essential.

"Art needs risk, surprise, contradiction, silence and emotional density," Bacelar says.

Read our full conversation on *Maracanós*, one of the most adventurous Brazilian jazz releases of the year.



Aírto Moreira - Photo credit: Maria Bacelar

"Aírto approaches music with the spirit of a child discovering sound for the first time."

Maracanós brings you together with the legendary Aírto Moreira, one of the most influential Brazilian musicians in jazz history. How did this collaboration first come about, and what made this the right moment for you both to create an album together?

This collaboration emerged very naturally through our friendship and through the documentary project we were developing around Aírto and Flora at Jasmin Studio. During the filming sessions, we spent many hours together inside the studio environment, talking about music, listening to sounds, and experimenting with rhythms and textures. At a certain point,

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the creative process itself became stronger than the original plan. We realized there was an album being born there organically.

I believe the timing was special because we were all completely open artistically. Aírto carries an extraordinary musical freedom, and I was interested in creating a sonic universe where Brazilian music, improvisation, cinematic atmospheres, and contemporary production could coexist without limitations. *Maracanós* became the result of that encounter.

You've described the project as being born organically during the filming of the documentary. Can you take us back to those sessions at Jasmin Studio in Fortaleza and describe the atmosphere that led to the creation of *Maracanós*?

The atmosphere was extremely creative and immersive. Aírto and Flora stayed with us in Fortaleza for an extended period, and the studio became almost like a living organism. Music happened all day long. Sometimes ideas would emerge during rehearsals, sometimes during conversations, and many times while the cameras were rolling.

Jasmin Studio is inside my home, so there is a very human and intimate dimension to the recordings. We were surrounded by Brazilian light, food, conversations, nature, silence, and deep musical exchange. That emotional proximity created trust, and trust creates freedom. I think you can hear that spirit throughout the album.

The album appears to embrace freedom, spontaneity and experimentation, qualities that have defined Aírto's career for decades. How did you balance structured composition with improvisational freedom during the recording process?

For me, composition and improvisation are not opposites. They complement each other. Some pieces began with harmonic structures or rhythmic ideas I brought to the sessions, but once the musicians entered the emotional space of the music, we allowed the compositions to breathe.

Aírto has an incredible instinct. He transforms rhythm into narrative. So I tried to create an environment where spontaneity could happen without losing the identity of the pieces. We recorded many moments in a very open way, preserving imperfections, interactions and emotional reactions. That human unpredictability became part of the language of the album.

Your production approach combines acoustic instruments, synthesizers, percussion and strings in a very cinematic way. What was your sonic vision for *Maracanós*, and how did you build that immersive soundscape?

I wanted the album to feel almost like a film without images. A sonic landscape where Brazilian rhythms could coexist with orchestral textures, electronic atmospheres, improvisation and silence.

The production was built very carefully inside Jasmin Studio, which is designed for immersive audio and deep acoustic detail. We used analog and digital elements together, combining percussion layers, piano, synthesizers, strings and spatial textures, almost like painting with sound.

I'm very interested in emotional depth and timbre. Sometimes a texture can say more than a melody. The immersive aspect of the production became fundamental in creating this sensation of movement, memory and atmosphere.



Ricardo Bacelar & Aírto Moreira – Photo credit: Maria Bacelar

“Flora transforms emotion into sound very naturally... Aírto approaches music with the spirit of a child discovering sound for the first time... They have an almost telepathic connection.”

Flora Purim makes a special appearance on “Voo da Tarde.” What did she bring to that track creatively, and what was it like having both Flora and Aírto together in the

studio?

Flora brings something very unique. She transforms emotion into sound very naturally. Her voice carries spirituality, freedom and an unmistakable musical identity. On “Voo da Tarde,” she added a dreamlike dimension that elevated the piece emotionally.

Having Flora and Airto together in the studio was deeply inspiring. They have lived and created music together for more than six decades, and there is an almost telepathic connection between them. Sometimes they communicated musically with just a glance. Witnessing that inside the studio was very moving.

Airto is receiving the prestigious National Endowment for the Arts honour this year. Did working so closely with him give you new insights into why his influence on jazz and Brazilian music remains so profound?

Absolutely. What impressed me most was not only his musical genius but his permanent curiosity. Airto approaches music with the spirit of a child discovering sound for the first time. He is always searching, always experimenting.

His influence goes far beyond percussion. He expanded the vocabulary of rhythm inside jazz and brought Brazilian musical identity into a truly global conversation without losing authenticity. Working closely with him made me understand even more deeply how innovation and freedom are connected in his artistic philosophy.

The title *Maracanós* is intriguing. What is the story behind the album's title, and what does it symbolize artistically or culturally?

The title was created by Airto Moreira himself, and I love the poetic and symbolic dimension it carries. *Maracanós* combines the words “maraca”, “Maracanã”, and the pronoun “nós”, which means “we” in Portuguese. The title, therefore, brings together rhythm, Brazilian identity, collectivity and movement at the same time.

There is something deeply Brazilian in the sound of the word, but also something open and universal. It evokes percussion, nature, birds, popular energy, community and encounter. I think this perfectly reflects the spirit of the album, a musical encounter built collectively through friendship, freedom, improvisation and cultural exchange.



Album cover artwork by Fernando França

“*Maracanós* represents friendship, freedom, improvisation and cultural exchange.”

The Kalimera String Quartet appears on two tracks with arrangements by Liduíno Pitombeira. Why was it important to incorporate strings into this project, and how did they expand the album's musical vocabulary?

The strings introduced another emotional layer to the album. I wanted certain moments to have greater harmonic depth and cinematic expansion, almost like opening a new emotional horizon inside the music.

Liduíno Pitombeira created arrangements with enormous sensitivity. He understands both classical language and Brazilian musical phrasing, which allowed the quartet to interact organically with percussion, improvisation and the rhythmic complexity of the album.

Your label, Jasmin Music, has become an important platform for Brazilian artists across multiple generations. How does *Maracanós* reflect your broader vision as a producer

and label founder?

Maracanós reflects very clearly what I believe Jasmin Music represents: artistic freedom, sonic excellence, cultural identity and creative risk.

I'm interested in building projects that preserve musical depth and emotional truth. We live in a time where music is often reduced to speed and algorithms. Jasmin was created to protect artistic identity and long-form musical experiences. This album embodies that philosophy completely.

Airto mentioned using his voice throughout the sessions in spontaneous ways when he wasn't playing percussion. Were there moments during the recording process that surprised you creatively?

Many moments surprised me. Airto uses his voice almost as an extension of rhythm and emotion. Sometimes he would suddenly begin vocalizing textures or rhythmic ideas while listening to playback, and those moments became part of the atmosphere of the recordings.

There was a constant sense of discovery in the studio. Some of the most beautiful moments happened unexpectedly.

The album moves away from commercial formulas and embraces artistic risk. In today's music industry, where algorithms often shape listening habits, how important is it for you to protect creative freedom?

For me, creative freedom is essential. Music cannot exist only to satisfy algorithms or consumption patterns. Art needs risk, surprise, contradiction, silence and emotional density.

I believe audiences still deeply desire authenticity. Perhaps the industry sometimes underestimates listeners. My commitment is to create music that has identity and emotional permanence, even if it follows a more difficult commercial path.



Airto Moreira – Photo credit: Maria Bacelar

“Music still has the power to create emotional bridges between cultures, generations and human experiences.”

The upcoming documentary directed by Jom Tob Azulay adds another dimension to this project. What can audiences expect from the film that they may not hear on the album itself?

The film reveals the human and emotional dimension behind the music. Audiences will witness the creative process in real time: conversations, rehearsals, improvisations, memories, tensions, humor, affection and the intimacy of artistic creation.

It is not only a documentary about music. It is also about friendship, artistic legacy, exile, Brazil, spirituality and the passage of time.

You've collaborated with artists such as Gilberto Gil, Roberto Menescal, Toninho Horta and many others. Where does Maracanós fit within your artistic evolution?

I see *Maracanós* as one of the most mature and free projects of my career. It synthesizes many things I've explored throughout the years: Brazilian harmony, cinematic language, sophisticated production, improvisation and emotional storytelling.

At the same time, it opened new creative doors. Working closely with Aírto and Flora expanded my perception of spontaneity and musical freedom.

The album cover artwork by Fernando França reflects a symbolic connection between Brazil and Africa. How important was visual storytelling in shaping the identity of this release?

Visual identity is extremely important to me. I see albums as complete artistic objects, not only collections of songs.

Fernando França created images that connect mythology, ancestry, Brazil, Africa and spirituality in a very powerful way. The artwork reflects the same emotional and symbolic layers that exist in the music itself.

Finally, what do you hope listeners around the world take away from Maracanós, especially those discovering your music, or perhaps even Aírto and Flora's legacy, for the first time?

I hope listeners feel an emotional connection and freedom. I hope the album invites people into a deeper listening experience, where music becomes atmosphere, memory and emotion.

For younger audiences discovering Aírto and Flora, I hope *Maracanós* reveals the timelessness of their artistic vision. For those discovering my work through this project, I hope they perceive the commitment to authenticity, sonic beauty and Brazilian musical identity.

I believe music still has the power to create emotional bridges between cultures, generations and human experiences. That is ultimately what *Maracanós* represents for me.

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Published 3 weeks ago on Jun 1, 2026
By **Danilo Navas**





Puerto Rican Guitarist and Leader of The Afro-Caribbean Jazz Collective José Guzmán

Introduction: The Rhythmic Map of José Guzmán

For guitarist and composer José Guzmán, the distance between the academic rigours of a Doctoral degree and the street-level pulse of a Puerto Rican *bomba* circle is non-existent. Born and raised in Ponce, Guzmán has spent his career translating the “hard 90-degree pivot” from rock-and-roll to jazz into a sophisticated, percussion-driven language. His latest project with The Afro-Caribbean Jazz Collective, *Cortadito*, serves as a vibrant proof of concept for his “drum-first” philosophy—an approach that demands the composer master the hand drums before ever picking up the pen.

In *Cortadito*, Guzmán departs from the traditional jazz quintet by daringly removing the drumset entirely. By centring the *barril* and congas, he creates a sonic space that smells of the Caribbean sea and feels like the cobblestones of Old San Juan. It is an intimate, unfiltered

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Estrella Acosta Charts New Paths on “Caminos - A Latin American Landscape”



Published 1 month ago on May 14, 2026
By Danilo Navas



Cuban Vocalist Estrella Acosta - Photo by Paul van Riel

Amsterdam-based Cuban-born vocalist Estrella Acosta continues to expand her artistic horizons with *Caminos – A Latin American Landscape*, a vibrant and far-reaching recording with her ensemble *Esquina 25*. A Latin Grammy nominee, Acosta has long been celebrated for her deep connection to Cuban and Brazilian traditions. With *Caminos*, she goes further—tracing a musical map that spans the breadth of Latin America.

From Mexico to Argentina, and from Afro-Caribbean grooves to Brazilian lyricism, the album embraces what Acosta describes as “music without borders,” brought to life through a collective of international musicians based in the Netherlands.

With *Caminos*, Estrella Acosta and her band *Esquina 25* offer more than a collection of songs—they present a living, breathing dialogue across cultures, traditions, and musical languages. It is a project that doesn’t simply travel across Latin America—it connects it.

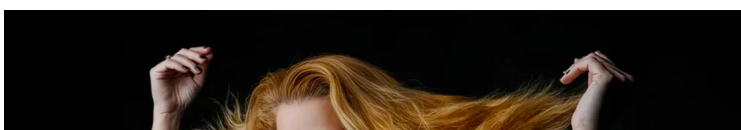
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Take Five with Ariacne Trujillo



Published 3 months ago on Mar 17, 2026
By Paul J. Youngman





Pianist, Arranger, Vocalist, Ariacne Trujillo - Photo: ariacne.com

From Havana to Ground Zero: How Ariacne Trujillo Survived and Found Her Sound Through Resilience, Classical Roots and Global Collaboration

Intro (Editor's note): From Havana's classical halls to the vibrant pulse of New York's Latin jazz scene, Ariacne Trujillo's journey is one of resilience, reinvention, and artistic discovery.

In this exclusive *Take Five* interview, the Cuban-born pianist, vocalist, and composer reflects on her early struggles as a newcomer in New York after arriving on a short-term scholarship—navigating isolation, financial hardship, and a rapidly shifting musical identity. Trujillo shares

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