Airto and Bacelar: 'Maracanós,' 2024-'25

The Brazilian pair unite for a thrilling, large-scale audio masterpiece



MARC MYERS

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Airto Moreira has never thought small. The Brazilian percussionist has an extraordinary imagination and an outsized gift for rhythm. Rather than add flavor here and there, as most percussionists are called upon to do, he became the center of attention when he began recording as a leader in the early 1970s.

Beginning with *Natural Feelings* (1970), his first leadership LP, Airto introduced a new form of fusion that united samba, rock, modal, avant-garde and jazz. His hybrid was wrapped in Brazilian exuberance and sensuality, and immediately caught the ears of a generation whose taste in music had matured along with the sophistication of their stereo systems.

Now, Jasmin Music has released *Maracanós,* a new album by Airto and Ricardo Bacelar, a Brazilian multi-instrumentalist, singer, composer and record producer. It was recorded between 2024 and '25, and Flora Purim, Airto's wife since 1966, sings on the fourth track (*Voo da Tarde*).

The new music is big and brash, combining a muscular, industrial-sounding orchestra with the tenderness of Airto's percussion and vocals and Bacelar's piano. This combination of hard and soft is so overwhelming and spectacular that I was immediately taken back to his earlier recordings in the 1970s and reminded of how significant he was and is.

It's such a momentous album that a feature-length documentary directed by Jom Tob Azulay is currently in post-production.

Airto, who turns 85 on August 5, was born in Itaiópolis, Brazil, and raised by spiritual parents. They were folk healers, and he grew up in Curitiba and São Paulo. A professional musician at 13, Airto began playing with the Sambalanço Trio, a bossa-samba ensemble, and recorded **Octeto De Cesar Camargo Mariano**, his first leadership album.

Airto and Purim relocated to the U.S. in the mid-1960s after the Brazilian military took over the country. Airto's intricate, exotic approach to percussion landed him in bands led by Miles Davis, beginning in 1969 and touring with the trumpeter's fusion band into 1971. He also recorded regularly with trumpeter Donald Byrd, Weather Report and dozens of other jazz musicians.

As a leader, he was the house percussionist at Creed Taylor's CTI label and also recorded leadership albums for Taylor. Airto's approach transcended percussion's limited role and filled space with a wide array of instruments that hissed, shimmered and made odd sounds. On tour he often rolled out his man-like sculptural figure that held his vast array of percussion instruments. In the process, he opened the U.S. market to world music.

The tracks:

- *Pé no Chão*
- *Mestre Novo da Guiné*
- *Bumbo Meu Boi*
- *Voo da Tarde (with Flora Purim)*
- *Maracanós*
- *Submersivos*
- *3 Minutos de Paz*
- *Pau Rolou*

Maracanós is a tremendously exciting, densely textured album that you'll play again and again for fresh discoveries. It's so engrossing and precious that you start at the beginning and have to let it play until the end uninterrupted. The music's magnitude commands attention and delivers enormous listener satisfaction.