



CLAUDIO RODITI

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b. 28 May 1946, Rio De Janeiro, Brazil. Roditi began playing piano as a child and studied formally for a while but although he continued to play piano, including it when he composes, he turned to the trumpet at the age of 12. He played in a school band and gradually, through records by Harry James, Louis Armstrong, Red Nichols and others, he began playing jazz alongside the music of his native land. During the 60s the Brazilian music scene was very lively, thanks in great part to the universal popularity of the bossa nova. Roditi worked extensively but in 1970 went to the USA to study at the Berklee College Of Music. For the next six years he played in the north-eastern states, eventually moving to New York. He continued to play Brazilian music, recording Cinnamon Flower with Bob Mover, on which he was joined by Charlie Rouse. Subsequent albums under his own name have been in the jazz idiom but his Brazilian musical roots often emerge. A strikingly proficient technician, Roditi brings enormous zest and fire to his playing. His eclecticism was put to good use during his work with the United Nations Orchestra, a band originating through Dizzy Gillespie. He has also worked with Slide Hampton's Jazz Masters. Roditi will continue to blend the two musical forms he loves. As he told StanWoolley in Jazz Journal International, "I am a Gemini. I was born in one country and live in another but I love them both, and both kinds of music, too".
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Discography: (year, title, label)

- 1984 - Red on Red, Greene Street
- 1985 - Claudio, Uptown
- 1988 - Gemini Man, Milestone
- 1989 - Slow Fire, Milestone
- 1990 - Two of Swords, Candid
- 1990 - Milestones [live], Candid
- 1994 - Free Wheelin': the Music of Lee Morgan, Reservoir
- 1995 - Samba Manhattan Style, Reservoir
- 1996 - Metropole Orchestra, Mons
- 1996 - Jazz Turns Samba, RTE
- 1996 - Double Standards, Reservoir
- 1997 - Claudio, Rio & Friends, RTE



Interview by Gregory (Goyo) F. Pappas: (Tue Apr 7, 2001 behind the stage at the Palo Alto College Jazz Festival, San Antonio, Texas)



Goyo: If you had to choose a few bars or a cut representative of your music which one would it be?

Claudio: "A tune that I wrote called Gemini Man, represents best the way I feel about Samba mixed with Jazz. It is from an album I also did by that name."

Goyo: I noticed that there is only one LP of yours that has not been re-issued on cd. According to the critic I read it is one of your best.

Claudio: "Oh yes! It is one from 1985 called Claudio with Rufus Reid, Mulgrew Miller, and Slide Hampton. The label that was supposed to release it, Uptown Records, was owned by two doctors, but when they split up they divided the catalog. As a result my LP went with the doctor that did not keep the business. The other guy was the one from Reservoir. It is a shame because that is a really nice LP. It is a shame that there are still many great LP's that have not been reissued. For example, there was a sax player in Rio called Meirelles and his group Os Copa 5. They did one fantastic album. I just saw him in Brazil this December and he does not even have a copy of his own album."

Goyo: What musicians would you like to play with (alive or dead) and have not had a chance?

Claudio: "I guess I have been very fortunate to play with most of them: Raul De Souza (living now in France), Slide Hampton, Edsel Machado (I was in his band before coming to the US), Dom Um Romao, Mcoy Tyner (who even recorded some of my tunes), and Horace Silver. I really wanted to play with Art Blakey and I talked with him once. He asked me for my phone number but nothing came about."

Goyo: Do you go often to Brazil? How would you compare Sao Paulo with Rio in regard to music?

Claudio: "Perhaps not as much as I would want, but I do go often enough to keep up with what is going on. There is always a lot going on. Last time I checked Banda Mantiqueira played every Tuesday night. There is also the big band Soundscape (with Daniel Alcantra and his family). I think right now Sao Paulo is a better city for music."

Goyo: Are there any particular young musicians that you think deserve wider recognition?

Claudio: "There is a Brazilian piano player called Helio Alves. He plays fantastic. Another one of the few that knows both the Brazilian and Afro-Cuban tradition."

Goyo: What new projects are you involved with? You do travel alot.

Claudio: "Yes! You cannot survive if you stay put. I go to Europe quite a bit. I have different groups that I play with, sometimes in Holland but mostly in Germany. I wish I did not have to travel so far and had more opportunities in the USA."

As far as my own projects I am in the process of doing a straight ahead quartet recording, something which I have not really done enough. I did include however a couple of Horace Silver tunes. We only have a rough mix. The group is composed of John Lee (bass), Cecil Brooks III (drums), Helio Alves (piano)."

Goyo: You should know that the members of Latin jazz egroup that saw

you in Miami this year reported that you blew everyone away with the version of "Song for my Father" you did with the Brazilian Jazz All Stars (Nilson Matta, Duduka Fonseca, Helio Alves and Romero Lubambo).

Claudio: "I am glad. Those guys have all been part of my band at some point. Duduka Fonseca is one guy who took the tradition of Edison Machado forward and also created his own sound. By the way, there is a new Trio Da Paz cd in the works (I was in two of their previous cd's). You are not going to believe how good this one is when it comes out."

Goyo: Historically the most famous combination of Brazilian with jazz is Bossa Nova. But are there other combinations worth mentioning? I notice that there is something "harder" about the approach to Brazilian jazz of musicians like Dom Um Romao, Airtio Moreira, Hermeto Pascoal, and you.

Claudio: "Let me explain to you what happen in Brazil in the late 50's and early 60's. When I move to Rio in 1964 (from a town in the interior) it was the height of the Bossa Nova period. A record label from Brazil called Musidisc issued in Brazil the entire Pacific jazz catalog, with artist like Chet Baker, Bud Shank, and Gerry Mulligan. Their LP's were available and cost much less than the imported records. That is why cool jazz had such a direct influence in that period, at least on Bossa Nova. Bossa was music that belonged primarily to singers, guitar players, piano players, and composers. But at that time something else happened that I saw first hand but you never hear about in the US. The guys that were playing saxophone, trumpet, drums and trombone were mostly playing what we called Samba Jazz. In other words, what you are calling a harder approach was played there in the 60's. There were musicians that grew up near the Favelas, like Edison Machado, that also loved Elvin Jones and Art Blakey. They had to play hard! There were many albums that came out playing a much harder approach but they went out of print very quickly. As a consequence the world does not know about that other side. There was a trio phase of musicians like Dom Salvador, Zimbo trio, Sambalanco trio, Tomba and a lot of other groups. Sometimes even the songs composed by Jobim were done in a Samba jazz approach, similar to the east coast jazz here. That is the kind of music that I like the most and that has influenced me the most. Raul de Souza, the Clifford Brown of valve trombone was one of my main influences."

Goyo: I do not understand why there has been so much mutual ignorance between Brazil and the Afro-Caribbean music world. What do you think about that gap? Don't you think there should be more musical communication?



Claudio: "One thing I want to say is that it is about time people acknowledge that Brazilian music is also Latin music. Brazil is the largest country in Latin America. There are many similarities between us beyond just eating a lot of beans. You are right, there is a gap. I could have done this interview in Spanish but there are not many other musicians I know that can speak both Portuguese and Spanish."

Goyo: Don't you think there are many possibilities yet to be explored in combining the harmonic sophistication of Brazil with the rhythmic complexity of the Afro-Caribbean world in a jazz context? The problem is who is going to do it? It has to be someone like Paquito, Edsel, or you.

Claudio: "Sure but it is hard. I have enough knowledge to appreciate differences and commonalities but I cannot claim to master the Afro-Cuban

tradition. Let me tell you what I think is the biggest barrier about the combination. Even though we were talking earlier about Samba jazz as being "hard" it is never as "macho" as, for example, the Afro-Cuban tradition. From that standpoint alone the mix is a challenge. But yes, you could take rhythms from Puerto Rico and combine them with some Brazilian style melodies. I am sure!"

Goyo: Would the David Sánchez group be a good candidate to do such a thing?

Claudio: "Well, when he records Brazilian he does it fully Brazilian. On the other hand, Edsel Gómez speaks Portuguese and has absorbed the culture. Did you know that I was in his recital at Berklee (next to Billy Peirce, Don Byron, and Sanabria)? He has a chance but the only one that I know that has done it with certain degree of success is Joao Donato (I performed with him this year at the blue note). He came from Brazil and worked in the Latin scene with people like Mongo Santamaria. He has tried to incorporate some of this knowledge into his compositions. Take for example, songs like "Amazonas" and "The Frog", you can do with them a Latin rhythm that is not Brazilian and yet the harmony is Brazilian."

Goyo: I am optimistic because of what has happened already in Latin jazz. It has opened itself to all Latin American influences, i.e., becoming Panamerican. To some extent I believe that you and Paquito should be given some credit, since many of your 80's albums were already headed in that direction. There was some obvious mutual learning going on between you and him.

Claudio: "The story is that Paquito got me and other Brazilians in his band because he wanted to learn about Brazilian music. Herbie Mann also hired me for the same reason. Paquito recorded one of my compositions called "WE (to Kirsten and me)" in the Celebration cd. I did not think of clave when I wrote that song but it ended up being in Afro-Cuban style with Giovanni playing the congas. The clave clashes a little bit in some points because I was thinking originally of it as a Brazilian tune but when I played it to Paquito he said "Oh yeah, great, but lets change the rhythm a bit." A similar thing happened when I did the arrangement of "Milestones" for Tito Puente's Live at the Village Gate. I conceptualized the thing with a 6/8 on the bridge and I ended up doing a lot of it on clave.

I am in favor of exploring possibilities but you just cannot start combining anything without a certain awareness and knowledge. Just like in food you are not going to pretend to combine Sushi with Cuban food. Integration is the challenge. We are certainly headed in a more world music direction. I am in fact listening lately to a lot of Arabic music. I have discovered fascinating trumpet players from Turkey and Egypt."

Goyo: Was not this Dizzy's vision?

Claudio: "Yes! He was predisposed to learn something new from all cultures. It is too bad he did not have the chance to jump into it fully to explore."

Goyo: For me he was mostly a good provoker, like any good teacher or leader. Is this a good time for Latin Jazz and do you have anything to say about the problem of its relative invisibility within the world of Jazz?

Claudio: "This is a problem especially here in the USA. In Europe they are not so close-minded. The media and the critics here look at Latin Jazz often as some sort of ethnic music and they cannot accept the fact that what we are

doing is jazz. My main focus in my music is improvisation. I use the songs as a medium for the soloist."

Goyo: Do you think there are many straight-ahead musicians who could become good Latin Jazz musicians because of their sensitivity to rhythm?

Claudio: "Maybe. Keep in mind many of these cats are too settled on Bebop. Sometimes jazz musicians try to do Latin jazz without the necessary knowledge and getting fully immersed. When I hear Stan Getz playing Brazilian music I do not think he had the right feeling for that music. He was a phenomenal sax player but he did not understand the rhythms at all. He did some Bossa Nova where the rhythm section is playing in 2/4 and he is playing 4/4! There are other famous guys that had the possibility and sensibility to do it but never really did. Miles Davis did Corcovado but that is all. Another one who could have done it was Lee Morgan since his approach to the trumpet was so rhythmic. Chet Baker had also a natural feel for it. In fact he did an album in Europe with some Brazilian guys that is hard to find."

Goyo: Which of your recordings (cd's) would you keep if you could keep only one?

Claudio: "Hard question! I like every one of them because in each I have tried something new, and there are things I like and do not in each."

Goyo: Any final words you want to add?

Claudio: "I want to send a message. We need to be humble. I think we cannot keep saying we are doing something new in combining Latin music and Jazz without recognizing what has been done before. If you take, for example, Mongo Santamaria, Ray Barretto, and the Gonzalez Brothers, these guys have been doing this stuff for years. The drummer Portinho and Airto Moreira composed tunes on 7/4 during the 70's! There are no new chords, notes, scales, or chord progression. What is left for us to do is to be humble, learn from each other, and try instead to create something *fresh* in terms of a mixture of elements."