

CIRCLE OF THE DANCE, ALMA BRASILEIRA
THE ART OF CLEA GALHANO, JOAN GRIFFITH AND LUCIA NEWELL

BEATRIZ H. RAMOS AMARAL

"Music and movement, as organic expressions of what it means to be human, are so entrenched and interlaced that it is difficult to define where the boundary between them is, or even if there is a boundary."

(Carlos D. Fregtman)

This intersection of musical styles - samba, *choro*, *bossa-nova*, *baião* – and talented interpreters and the works of some of the best Brazilian composers could only result in a splendid album. *CIRCLE OF THE DANCE* was recorded in Minneapolis, Minnesota by Clea Galhano (flutist), Joan Griffith (guitar and composer) and Lucia Newell (vocals), who make up the *Alma Brasileira* (Brazilian Soul) trio. The producer is Steven Wiese, and pianist Laura Caviani and percussionist Tim O'Keefe contributed to some of the tracks. The fifteen tracks of this CD brings us work by Egberto Gismonti, Hermeto Pascoal, Pixinguinha, Mário Mascarenhas, Luis Bonfá, Waldir Azevedo and Ari Barroso, as well as five pieces by Joan Griffith, all compositions based on traditional Brazilian rhythms such as the *baião*, *samba* and *bossa nova*, through which the interpreter/composer/arranger navigates with extreme ease and comfort. As soon as one listens to this CD for the first time, one is overtaken by the desire to listen to it again, and again and again ... an infinite number of times.

This important phonographic record is the result of the musical meeting of Clea Galhano, Joan Griffith and Lucia Newell, all artists with solid international

careers. Clea is a Brazilian flute virtuoso who has lived in the US for many years (2), and Joan and Lucia are well-known artists. This exciting CD covers the traditions of Brazilian instrumental music with elegance, refinement and vigor, with some original melodies of greater harmonic complexity that we can easily make out in the *bossa-nova* tracks, and the more subtle rhythms and timbers of the very well worked dialog between the winds (Clea's recorder), voice (Lucia) and strings (guitar, mandolin and *cavaquinho*, all played by Joan). Vocalist Lucia Newell adds the density of her jazz experience to the trio, with a combination of lightness, freedom and daring that is well suited to the pieces that make up the very beautiful repertoire of *Circle of the Dance*. Lucia, the co-author of two tracks (she wrote the words to *Nina* and *Because of Love*), studied music in Brazil for two years. Her velvety voice flows across the melodic architecture of the tracks entitled *Nina*, *Manhã de Carnaval*, *Circle of the Dance* and *Because of Love*, articulating counterpoint flows of the flute, strings, piano and percussion. Only these four tracks have her voice, the eleven remaining tracks are instrumental, including *Papagaio Embriagado* by Mário Mascarenhas, a virtuoso of the *choro*. Originally, the composer had included lyrics, but in the esthetic project of the Alma Brasileira trio these were replaced with the perfect, fascinating melodic phrasing of Clea Galhano's recorder. The very inspired *Circle of the Dance*, which is also the name of the CD, was composed by Joan Griffith with lyrics by Janis Hardy. As in any other tracks with words, the song is recorded in both Portuguese and English.

The CD opens with Joan's *Baião*. A brief introduction by the piano and percussion prepares us for the flute that, with broad notes, develops the initial melody, in some moments adding delicate ornaments that contribute density, opening the way for a constant, marked rhythm that gives way to the theme that repeats itself.

This is followed by *Nina* singing a delicate *bossa-nova*, where Joan Griffith shows us her talent as a composer of different styles and genres, both vocal and instrumental and, in this particular case, of typically Brazilian music. Her musical versatility is further confirmed in the different string instruments (guitar, mandolin, *cavaquinho* and bass) that she plays, the first three of which we hear on this CD, and her varied didactic activities. (3). *Sertão*, which she also wrote,

is also lyrical and subtle example that impregnates the rhythmic structure of the *baião*.

In *Bebê*, by Hermeto Pascoal, the virtuosity of the flute runs across the semi-quavers of the dancing melody, seconded by the mandolin. Meantime, the harmonic and percussion instruments enrich the profusion of musical ideas that precisely articulate the syncopated cells of this exuberant *baião*, considered a milestone of Brazilian instrumental music ever since it was recorded by its composer in 1973 (4).

The next tracks are *Aquarela do Brasil*, (5) by Ari Barroso, and *Manhã de Carnaval*, by Luis Bonfá/Antônio Maria, both masterpieces that are representative of two of the facets of the Brazilian musical soul, almost the top and flip sides of an alternating semantic game between the jubilant atmosphere of well-placed boasting, in Barroso's samba, and the lament that characterizes the end of a party in a lesser tone, and especially the expressive notes of the legato played by the recorder in Bonfá's song. *Manhã de Carnaval* starts with the theme, played by Joan Griffith in a guitar solo, clearly accentuating a more intimate tone, repeated then by Clea Galhano's flute and then the voice of Lucia Newell. Bonfá and Antônio Maria's music was part of the sound track of the 1959 movie *Black Orpheus*, an Italy-Brazil-France co-production led by Marcel Camus. *Black Orpheus* is one of the most often recorded Brazilian songs, and can be found in diverse languages. The magic of the recorder makes the interpretation of Trio Alma Brasileira very special, and will certainly become an anthological recording.

These tracks are followed by spectacular interpretations of the works of Waldir Azevedo, the samba entitled *Vê se Gostas*, the *choro*-song entitled *Pedacinho do Céu*, and the classical *choro Carinhoso*, by Pixinguinha. These same *choro* icons also wrote two of the other compositions on the CD. *Vou Vivendo* (Pixinguinha) and *Brasileirinho*, by Azevedo. The performances given by Clea Galhano and Joan Griffith bring value to the expressive counterpoint articulations of this music, fully justifying the worlds of Andrea Carter in the disc insert: “Spend an hour with Circle **of the Dance** and you begin to differentiate these styles - the popular harmonies of samba, the complex urban rhythms of

*bossa nova, the Baroque 'ragtime' of choro, the colorful country dance of baião. And fast or slow, wistful or festive, the unifying thread throughout the music, throughout **Circle of the Dance**, is the celebration of that inner core of joy that defines the Brazilian soul."*

We also call attention to the interpretation of *Papagaio Embriagado*, a *choro* written by Mário Mascarenhas in onomatopoeic format, opening the melody with a type of question, a three-quaver anacrusis in two intervals followed by a quaver (the first ascending and the next descending), which announce the next melody. As said by José Miguel Wisnik in *O Som e o Sentido (Sound and Sense)*. "*the quaver is an interval with no dynamic-affective value. In principal, it is a neutral sound spacer. Many cultures use the same name for two octave notes (while different, they are the same note returned in another frequency). This interval frames the scales*".

Papagaio Embriagado has an anacrusis of quavers followed by the vibrant sound of the flute, precisely attacking the melody and irradiating the theme in a fast, descending scale of semi-quavers. The introductory rhythmic cell made up of the three quavers is repeated elsewhere in the melody, sometimes with an interval of a quaver, at others repeating the note in the same frequency. The beauty of the *choro* is clear in this fast-paced work where the melodic flights include chromatisms played by the flute. These delicious musical phrases are interspersed with syncopes and, in the second part, picks up even more speed as the flute comes in and develops the melody in its full virtuosity.

In his book entitled "*Música, Maestro*", Julio Medaglia says that "*the last two decades of the 19th century is when the language of the choro came together, the same happening with ragtime, which forms the basis of US jazz. Both take advantage of the highly developed instrumentality of European dance music - the polka, the Scottish, the waltz, quadrille, mazurka and other forms. In Brazil, the syncopated rhythm of sound originating in Africa gives choros more swing than early jazz (ragtime)*". These same forces, origins and time-frames, and the fact that both emerged simultaneously, may explain the ease with which Joan Griffith and Lucia Newell, both jazz musicians, dove into this CD and, while they

are Americans, embraced the challenge of Brazilian music and perform it with a remarkable degree of familiarity and excellence.

To complete this sample of magnificent composers, the CD brings us Egberto Gismonti's *Água e Vinho*, originally recorded on a disc by the same name, with lyrics by poet Geraldo Carneiro. *Trio Alma Brasileira* opted to record a completely instrumental version, with a polyphonic structure that explores the different timbres of the flute and guitar, which dialog in what is one of the most perfect combinations in chamber music. A sensitive interpretation highlights the beautiful melodic structure created by Gismonti.

A special note about *Circle of the Dance*, the track that gave this CD its name. The music was composed by Joan Griffith, while Janis Hardy wrote the lyrics, which were then translated from English into Portuguese by Lucia Newel, who sings the melody in this track, alternating with Clea Galhano's flute. Accompanied by Joan's guitar, the vocal and instrumental interpreters use their performances to underscore the circularity of each rhythm and that contracts, much as a centripetal force, towards the nucleus of the work, the core of the album, consolidating the weight of each note, the shape of each silence that molds them and the journey one embarks on when hearing the call of the melody. And suddenly, in a procedure similar to the intertextuality one so often finds in literature, the flute pays homage to Luiz Gonzaga's most famous baião - Asa Branca - by inserting a descending thirds sequence between the different times of the music.

Analyzing the circular nature of melodies, José Miguel Wisnik said: the melodies are part of a production in a circular, recurring tempo that drives one to an experience that has "no time" or that is in a "virtual time". He goes on to discuss the pre-tonal structure and tonal system, pointing to the circularity of the scale that "evolve around one fundamental note that provides both the entrance and exit point for the melodies or, said another way, the tonic, the reference for all other notes." Inherent to all systems and to the very essence of music, circularity manifests in dance and in movement, as the circle symbolizes time and infinity.

The circle always runs back into itself. It represents unity, the absolute, perfection. According to Herder Lexicon, in Zen Buddhism, Christianity, the Kabbalah, and Jungian psychology, the circle has a place of honor. In Buddhism, concentric circles are used to represent the highest level of enlightenment. It is interesting to note here that the insert for Clea Galhano's first solo album, *Magic Circle* (1996), includes a segment by Rilke: "...in this immeasurable darkness, be the Power that rounds your senses in their Magic circle, the sense of their mysterious encounter".

Clea is internationally known for her work with Ancient, Renaissance, Baroque and Contemporary music, and in her artistic project she seems to see in this circularity/overlap an opening for sound in its full, immaterial plenitude. Pollinating the listener's esthetic experience, *Circle of the Dance* passes through a range of rhythmic seasons. Its circular, counterpoint path gives us an extraordinary window of esthetic pleasure. The encounter of interpreters of different nationalities chose to use musical styles that are traditional to Brazilian culture to pollinate a specific idea of soul in a state of sound and rhythm. Rhythm, according to José Miguel Wisnik, that is "not merely a linear and progressive succession of short and long tempos, but an oscillation of different time values around a core that affirms itself through regular repetition, and moves through the asymmetric overlap of pulses and the interference of irregularities, a core that makes itself present and then moves away as if it were out of tempo - a virtual tempo, another tempo." Alternatively, as the CD shows us, a tempo where all of the fractions converge in a delicate, magical and polyphonic circle.

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- (1) Circle of the Dance - Alma Brasileira (recorded, mixed and masterized in August 2009 by Creation Audio, Studio "A", Minneapolis, Minnesota) Sound engineers: Steven Wiese and Miles Hanson. Executive Producer: Steven Wiese).
- (2) Brazilian flutist Clea Galhano started her music studies in São Paulo (Faculdade Santa Marcelina), and then continued at the Royal Conservatory in the Hague (Netherlands) and the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston. She specialized in Ancient, Renaissance and Baroque music, and to interpreting Brazilian music. In addition to her international career as a soloist, Clea is the Artistic Director of the St. Paul Conservatory of Music in Minnesota, and musical director of the Recorder Orchestra of the Midwest. Among her albums are Magic Circle, Blue Baroque Band, Belladonna, Songs in the Ground and Distribution of Flowers.
- (3) Joan Griffith plays a range of instruments (guitar, bass, mandolin and cavaquinho) and composes music of different genres and styles. She is also a professor of various instruments and jazz at the University of St. Thomas and Macalester College. She is also a member of the *Minnesota State Arts Board and Young Audiences*. Singer Lucia Newell has an active career as a soloist, singing in concert halls, jazz clubs and festivals around the world. She also teaches improvisation and composition. Among her recordings are Steeped in Strayhorn and The Poetry of Jazz: Pablo"
- (4) *Bebe* is part of the 1973 album entitled "*A Musica Livre de Hermeto Pascoal*"
- (5) *Aquarela do Brazil*, one of the tracks on the Circle of the Dance CD is available on youtube. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ItWNwkvx5sY>

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