

Tania Maria – Canto (2012)



01 – *Chorinho Brasileiro* 02 – *Intimidade* 03 – *Canto* 04 – *Samba Do Gato* 05 – *Florzinha*
06 – *Vou Te Amar* 07 – *Ca c'est bon* 08 – *Ze Marmita* 09 – *Carlos Song* 10 – *Thanks Mr G*

Tania Maria might be the best Brazilian musical artist working outside her own country. This jazz pianist and singer had to move to France to win acclaim, and is now pretty well-known by jazz aficionados worldwide—but very few other people. While she might not have the cache of other Brazilian musicians who started out in rock or Tropicalia or regional styles, she certainly can still bring the heat at age 64. This set, recorded with her trio a few years ago, should easily admit her to the pantheon of “Brazilians who are actually known and paid attention to in other countries,” if such a phenomenon can still occur anymore. Whether she’s turning a samba into a rumba, like in leadoff track “Chorinho Brasileiro”, or chewing all the scenery on power ballads such as “Zé Marmita”, Tania Maria knows how to be exactly who she is: a great (but not technically overwhelming) pianist, and an affecting (but strangely-voiced) singer with a surprisingly low vocal range.

There’s not a lot of subtlety to her approach; she often hammers her way through a solo, and has a tendency to sing along with her trickier piano solos. You can almost hear her lower her head to charge through “Carlos Song”, a sweet bossa nova funk number that might otherwise be mistaken for a love song.

“Ca C’est Bon” is a flat-out samba sprint with a solo that resembles a player piano mechanism gone out of control. The band yells the chorus along with their leader, then starts to yell the whole melody along with her; the whole thing is about as deep as a puddle, but I bet it’s a hell of a lot of fun to yell at a concert, or at Carnival.

This hell-bent for leather approach works perfectly for pieces like “Intimidade”, a forró number that swings like sixty and has hints of a Tom Jobim arrangement. It’s also hilariously appropriate for album closer “Thanks Mr. G”, a samba jazz thing that is so amped-up and hyper that you fear Maria won’t be able to keep up with it for her solo—and yet she nails several passages right on, and has enough to undergird a simultaneous solo by everyone in the damn horn section. Anyone who won’t smile listening to “Thanks Mr. G” is someone you don’t want to associate with.

But the real jam here is “Samba Do Gato”. It’s kind of a samba, but its rhythm is actually more like a New Orleans second-line beat, so you know they’re getting sexy like that. The band curls its talents around this song for a full 11 minutes and 26 seconds, going through several mood shifts along the way. The crucial section is a modulated middle that leads to a joyous piano/scat dual solo, where Maria sings along with her own keyboard inventions, and then unpeels a selection of barrel house riffs that would make Lil Armstrong weep with the seven jealousies.

“Samba Do Gato” would be a career-defining song—if Tania Maria hadn’t already put together such an undefinable career. This record, already issued in Europe last year, is hitting U.S. shores in 2013, so there’s PLENTY of time to compare everything else you hear to this. All I have to say is, “Good luck, everyone else.” ---Matt Cibula, popmatters.com

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