

Harvey Wainapel

LONG BIOGRAPHY

Many an American jazz musician has been smitten by Brazil's beguiling melodic riches and vast array of rhythms. For reed master **Harvey Wainapel**, what started as a passionate affair has deepened into an abiding relationship built on a geographically expansive web of musical connections that grows with each sojourn south. Following up on his gorgeous 2007 travelogue ***Amigos Brasileiros***, Wainapel documents his ongoing passion for contemporary Brazilian music with ***Amigos Brasileiros Vol. 2***, a breathtaking collection of new compositions by Brazilian masters. Recorded with a superlative cast of Brazilian instrumentalists and composers he's befriended during his travels, the album includes several tunes written specifically for the project.

Equally adept on clarinets and saxophones, Wainapel (pronounced wine-apple) has performed with some of jazz's most acclaimed musicians over the past three decades, including pianists Kenny Barron and McCoy Tyner, tenor saxophonist Joe Henderson, drummer Billy Hart, and fellow reed expert Joe Lovano. He's found similarly formidable creative allies amongst the ranks of Brazil's top composers, players and arrangers, artists he showcases on both editions of ***Amigos Brasileiros***. While he's more than generous with the spotlight, Wainapel also leaves no doubt he's one of the most eloquent clarinetists around, and a saxophonist of unusual presence and power on soprano and alto.

In many ways ***Amigos Brasileiros Vol. 2*** serves as a savvy on-the-ground survey of the contemporary Brazilian scene, a thoughtfully curated guide to musicians' musicians in a nation bound together by sound. The album opens with "**Mamulengo**," a captivating, deceptively off-kilter tune by the brilliant and prolific composer **Léa Freire**. She accompanies Wainapel's graceful clarinet on piano, and while the piece draws on São Paulo's deep pool of talent the rhythmic feel is decidedly from Brazil's northeast.

Recife, the capital of the northeastern state of Pernambuco, supplies two of the album's most electrifying tracks. The composer and saxophonist **Spok**, who leads the renowned frevo band SpokFrevo Orquestra, wrote the tune "**Nilinho Na Aldeia**" for Wainapel, a deliriously grooving caboclinho that features the two men tag-teaming on soprano saxophones, playing a series of searing solos and unison lines backed only by the insistent percussion work of **Lucas dos Prazeres**. Wainapel teams up with another giant of Pernambucan music on "**Triunfando**," a lushly orchestral xote by **Marco César**, who also contributes a ravishing solo on mandolin.

The state of Minas Gerais, famous for Milton Nascimento and Toninho Horta among others, continues to produce exceptional musicians. Wainapel has forged friendships with several inventive players in the capital Belo Horizonte, and bassist **Enéias Xavier** is one of them. He contributes “**Boneca de Pano**,” a tune dedicated to the great Minas guitarist **Beto Lopes**, who introduces the dreamy piece on acoustic guitar.

Beto’s brother **Wilson**, another brilliant Minas guitarist, is a long-time collaborator with Milton Nascimento. Expanding on Wilson’s “**Árvore**,” originally a guitar duo, Wainapel created an improvisation-laced quartet version featuring Wilson on acoustic guitar, Beto on electric bass, and **Sergio Silva** on percussion. Full of unanticipated twists and turns, the brisk melody feels like something from a 1980s Keith Jarrett quartet session infused with Brazilian warmth.

One track didn't require traveling to Brazil. In fact, one of the album’s highlights resulted from a journey north to the Tacoma (Washington) area, where he recorded with Rio-born pianist/composer **Weber Iago**, who contributed “**Palavras de Menina**.” Backed by **Jeff Busch**’s pandeiro and Iago’s sparkling piano, Wainapel overdubbed himself as a clarinet quartet (three clarinets and bass clarinet) on Iago’s supremely hip chamber choro arrangement, with its multiplicity of gliding and sliding lines. By the time he reaches the closing track, the melancholy 1940s standard “**Velho Realejo**” featuring the mother and son team of pianist **Silvia Goes** and electric bassist **Thiago do Espirito Santo**, Wainapel has covered a startling array of material. Recorded in São Paulo, the tune features the familial trio with **Alex Buck** on drums and Wainapel’s dry-martini alto offering an elated but plaintive farewell.

“I’ve been pretty ambitious with both of these CDs, but I’m still just scratching the surface,” Wainapel says. “There are so many traditions and styles that are very localized and not commercial, so you won’t hear them on the radio.”

Wainapel has spent a few months of every year in Brazil since his first trip in 2000, and can often be found playing in Brazilian music settings back home in the USA. In Brazil he has performed with such highly-esteemed musicians as **Guinga**, **Nelson Ayres**, **Filó Machado**, **Mauro Senise**, and **Paulo Bellinati**. He’s also toured widely with **Flora Purim** and **Airto Moreira**, and performs with the great Rio-born vocal improviser **Claudia Villela**. He’s forged a particularly close creative connection with Seattle pianist/composer **Jovino Santos Neto**, performing widely as a member of his quintet and participating on three recent CDs, including the Latin Grammy-nominated *Canto do Rio*. Santos Neto spent 15 years in the band of seminal multi-instrumentalist/composer Hermeto Pascoal before relocating to the US. Other California-based Brazilian activities include Wainapel’s years-long partnership with Recife-born guitarist/composer **Carlos Oliveira**, vocalist **Sandy Cressman**’s “Homenagem Brasileira,” and the **Berkeley Choro Ensemble**.

Which isn't to say that Wainapel has forsaken his jazz roots. He is an active freelancer in the Bay Area, leads his own post-bop combos, and performs with **Clarinet Thing**, an all-star clarinet quartet that also features **Beth Custer**, **Sheldon Brown**, and **Ben Goldberg**.

Raised in Ellenville, New York, a small town in the Catskills, **Harvey Wainapel** started his musical journey on clarinet at the age of eight. By high school he had discovered jazz by playing along with tunes on New York City radio stations, and added alto and soprano saxophones during his freshman year at the University of Pennsylvania.

Initially intending to follow the family tradition of pursuing a career in medicine or science, he ended up taking the plunge into music, trading the Ivy League for Berklee in 1971. It was a heady era, and Wainapel played with fellow students and future heavyweights such as guitarist John Scofield, pianist Kenny Werner, trumpeter Claudio Roditi, and tenor saxophonist Joe Lovano, with whom he toured Europe decades later. "I was scared all the time," Wainapel says. "That's how you grow!" During his Boston years Wainapel also recorded and performed in Carnegie Hall with vibraphonist **Gary Burton**.

After two years at Berklee, when the opportunity came up to tour throughout Tunisia for two months with a Latin jazz band organized by drummer **Jamey Haddad** (who later went on to play in the groups of Dave Liebman and Paul Simon) Wainapel made the trip to North Africa; afterward he ended up settling in Amsterdam, where he dug the lifestyle and slowly started making a living at music.

After almost four years in Amsterdam Wainapel scored a full-time job with the **HR Radio Big Band** in Frankfurt, which brought him to Germany for a year. The experience proved valuable ("I learned how to play lead alto in that band," Wainapel says), but by 1979 he was ready to return stateside. He landed in New York City, which is where he first became enamored with Brazilian music.

He quickly landed a gig playing in a large Brazilian jazz ensemble led by **Thiago de Melo**, which also included the great Rio-born drummer Duduka da Fonseca and trumpeter Roditi. The band's pianist **Marcos Silva** turned Wainapel on to numerous other Brazilian artists, including Elis Regina and Ivan Lins. "The fever I contracted became very strong and hasn't gone away," Wainapel says. "In my case it became an obsession, leading me to these annual trips, though I play jazz there too. Brazilians love jazz, so it's 50/50. The Brazilian side injects a lot of emotion into my playing, and it opened up my concept of melody and harmony."

Deciding he wasn't cut out for New York, he determined to relocate to the San Francisco Bay Area, a move facilitated by a year on the road in the **Ray Charles**

big band. He settled in the East Bay in 1982, and quickly became one of the most in-demand players in the region, eventually making his recording debut as a leader with 1994's ***At Home/On the Road*** (JazzMission Records), a critically hailed post-bop session exploring compositions by the likes of Woody Shaw, Sam Rivers, and Wayne Shorter. He followed up two years later with ***Ambrosia: The Music of Kenny Barron*** (A-Records), featuring a suite of Barron's tunes arranged by Jeff Beal for the Metropole Orchestra and a set of Barron's Brazilian-inspired music arranged for a sextet by pianist Marcos Silva. **Kenny Barron** himself was on hand for piano duties on Wainapel's acclaimed 1998 straight-ahead quintet session ***The Hang*** (Spirit Nectar/JazzMission), which also featured drummer **Kenny Wollesen** and the brothers **Phil and Larry Grenadier** on trumpet and bass, respectively.

Wainapel's first full recording of Brazilian music was 2004's ***New Choros of Brazil*** (Acoustic Music Records/Proteus Entertainment), a gorgeous duo collaboration with legendary Brazilian guitarist **Paulo Bellinati**. They decided to do a project together focusing on previously unrecorded choros by masters like Sergio Assad, Guinga, Sergio Santos, and Dori Caymmi. "I'm really proud of it," says Wainapel, who plays clarinet exclusively on the album, which they recorded in São Paulo. "That project gave me a lot of confidence"

After some years of traveling regularly to Brazil and connecting with various musicians, Wainapel realized he could take much the same approach with a larger cast of players. He's not averse to playing standards—he recently did a sold-out run at the SFJAZZ Center playing the music of Jobim with vocalist Claudia Villela—but with so much amazing music being written now he feels there's no reason to look backwards. Instrumental music in particular is overshadowed in Brazil by vocal music, which means many of the ***Amigos Brasileiros*** players and composers are unsung at home.

"The first time I went down I hardly knew anybody but I learned Portuguese, and now I can speak fluently though not necessarily correctly," Wainapel says. "People sensed I was sincere. I started calling musicians saying that I want to record new songs, and many of my heroes were willing to do this with me. I want to reflect what's happening now with the colleagues I meet, and they were kind enough to include me on their scene. There's so much creative energy down there. You never get to the end of it."

Musical information has been flowing between between Brazil and the United States for at least a century, a current that turned into a torrent with the confluence of cool jazz and bossa nova in the late 1950s. Wainapel has opened up his own stream with ***Amigos Brasileiros***, documenting the wondrous wealth of contemporary Brazilian masters who should be better known throughout the world.