

HARVEY WAINAPEL

Can a man serve two masters?

If the cat in question is Bay Area reed expert Harvey Wainapel, and the disciplines are jazz and Brazilian music, the answer is a resounding yes. A supremely eloquent clarinetist and a saxophonist of unusual presence and power, Wainapel is a truly ambidextrous artist who has delved deeply into two vast and variegated traditions. Of course, musical currents have ebbed and flowed between the two continental nations for much of the past century, and Wainapel is fully at home at the confluence of those influences (he's toured widely with Brazilian jazz giants Airto Moreira and Flora Purim). But most of the time he's got his feet firmly planted in one country or the other, even if his experience in the south shapes his work as an improviser. "The Brazilian side injects a lot of emotion into my playing, and it opened up my concept of melody and harmony," Wainapel says.

Wainapel (pronounced wine-apple) got his start as a jazz musician, and over the past three decades he's performed with masters such as pianists Kenny Barron and McCoy Tyner, tenor saxophonist Joe Henderson, drummer Billy Hart, and fellow reed expert Joe Lovano. He made 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. Wainapel 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 for a sextet with Marcos Silva on keyboards. 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 features 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. Rather than focusing on Brazilian standards, they assembled a program of 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. "That project gave me a lot of confidence."

His two most recent recordings, *Amigos Brasileiros* and *Amigos Brasileiros Vol. 2*, are part of Wainapel's ongoing process documenting his passion for contemporary Brazilian music. Recorded with a superlative cast of Brazilian instrumentalists he's befriended during his many travels around the country, the albums include several tunes written specifically for the project. In many ways *Amigos Brasileiros* 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.

From Ellenville, New York, a small town in the Catskills, 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 while he longed to play saxophone he didn't get his first horn, an alto, until his freshman year at the University of Pennsylvania. Working at the college radio station, he experienced a series of epiphanies discovering the music of giants like Cannon-ball Adderley, Coltrane, and Joe Henderson.

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. 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 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 various other Brazilian artists. "The fever I contracted became very strong and hasn't gone away," Wainapel says. "In my case it became an obsession."

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 with Ray Charles. He settled in the East Bay in 1982, and quickly became one of the most in-demand players in the region. At the same time he's kept a presence in Europe, including performances playing specially commissioned arrangements with the Klüvers Big Band (a.k.a. Aarhus Jazz Orchestra) in Denmark and the Metropole Orchestra in Holland. He's also established himself as a singular presence on the Brazilian scene, spending at least a few months of every year there since 2000.

"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."

Back at home, Wainapel can often be found playing Brazilian music, performing 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 composer and multi-instrumentalist Hermeto Pascoal before relocating to the US.

Other California-based Brazilian activities include Wainapel's years-long partnership with Recife native 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 jazzroots. He leads his own post-bop combos, freelances extensively, and performs with Beth Custer's "Clarinet Thing," an all-star clarinet quartet that also features Ben Goldberg and Sheldon Brown.

"I tend to think of myself as a late bloomer," says Wainapel. "I've been at it a long time, but still have a lot of new sounds to share; if I can still add a little beauty to the world, I'll be grateful."