

## Maurice Zottarelli

By Gary Heimbauer

**JJ:** Talk about your new recording, the concept, development and coming to life in the studio?

**MZ:** This CD has been in the works for quite some time. I always wanted to write my own music, and play things the way I hear them, uncompromisingly. A few years ago I had a vision for a project that would mix my Brazilian roots with Jazz, Fusion, and even Rock. Although there are many contemporary Brazilian artists doing many interesting things with

compelling statement. I still love to play anything though, from completely free improvisation to very structured compositions. From Jazz to Rock, to Latin, to Folk. I noticed also that the understanding of the beauty and complexity of improvised music can actually free you up even on a musical situation where there is no improvisation involved. I think that the musicianship that one achieves by performing and absorbing improvised music can make him or her a much better artist in *any* situation.

*“it is important for us to know our limitations, and understand that we are constantly evolving. Progress takes time, and a lot of effort. But I do think it is important to take breaks occasionally.”*

Brazilian and Latin music nowadays, I believe that we achieved something unique with this project, and I hope that this will contribute to spread out our culture even more to different audiences. With that initial idea in mind, I wrote several pieces of music trying to push the envelope a bit on what we call “Brazilian Jazz”. I inverted/changed some of the “traditional” drum grooves, played around with different harmonies and melodies, and I even added a few rhythmic ideas from South Indian Carnatic music in the mix. If something was sounding different, that wasn’t necessarily a “bad” thing.

When we got into the studio to record, I was pleasantly surprised. All the musicians involved had a huge impact on bringing this music to life, which went beyond their playing, and beyond my expectations. These guys are also terrific composers, so that was a big plus! I knew where I wanted to go musically, but I was also pretty much opened to anything. I decided early on that I wanted to give them a framework on what to do, but wanted to capture their input too, and at the end I think we managed to do that well. On top of this, there was a big pre-occupation about creating a “melodic statement” for the album. I knew I didn’t want to do a “drummer’s CD”, completely full of rhythmic things, drum solos and things of that sort. They are there of course, but in a way that sounds more musical and collaborative to me. I tried my best to find a good balance among different rhythms and styles, interesting harmonic ideas, strong melodies and composition, and improvisation too.

**JJ:** What is it about musical improvisation that you find compelling and valuable?

**MZ:** I love the freedom. It always fascinated me that with improvisation you can fully express yourself, and in most of the cases, you can say whatever you want and have to say. After playing music for almost 15 years, I feel that playing improvised music is the best way for me to express what I want, and make a

**JJ:** What was it that initially inspired you to play this music?

**MZ:** I first got exposed to jazz and improvisation through my family, specially my dad, who loves it. Also, growing up in Brazil, I would play percussion or a drum in circles with other people when I was very young, improvising around a samba or a carnival beat. That was also important to me, although it didn’t strike me until recently. When I went to music school, I started to go deeper into jazz, music theory and composition, and again, the freedom of expression that can be found in jazz and improvisation was amazing to me. It was also fascinating to hear how different and unique a creative jazz musician could sound compared to his peers, even when performing the exact same material. So, it became clear to me that I wanted to do something in music closely related to jazz and improvisation. I guess the possibilities of creating a special and personal sound plus the freedom to express this uniqueness on this music grabbed me instantly.

**JJ:** When you first embarked on the sophisticated journey of becoming an improvising musician, or a jazz musician who plays over changes, what were some methods that you found extremely useful to achieving your goals?

**MZ:** I think it is important to listen to improvised music as much as possible. Its is crucial to understand where the master players are coming from and where they are intending to go next, in order to try to innovate and create a unique sound – and ultimately create our own voice. Another important aspect of this music is that we never seem to be “done” – improvising is a constant search of sounds, voice, vibe, concepts... there is always something to learn, and always a way to be a better artist, so you can express you



art properly. On a more specific note, I usually like to practice and play with people as much as possible. An important part of improvising consists is reacting to and interacting with what is happening around you. So, playing with other people as much as possible will develop your ears, musical reflexes, and your ability to play what is necessary for a particular musical situation. It will certainly make you a more musical artist. As a drummer, I make it a priority for me to support the soloists, but more importantly, interact creatively with them - not just repeating/playing what they just played... that’s not really a conversation! And when it’s time for me to take a solo, I like to draw my ideas from what happened on previous solos, and/or what’s being suggested by the music at that moment. I like to let things flow according to what is happening. Playing with people - as opposed to practicing in our bedroom or practice room by ourselves - seems to be a huge help in getting this whole concept together.

**JJ:** What do you do to recharge your batteries and decompress in the face of the stresses and distractions in our contemporary world?

**MZ:** That is probably the biggest challenge for me right now. I think it is important for us to know our limitations, and understand that we are constantly evolving. Progress takes time, and a lot of effort. But I do think it is important to take breaks occasionally. I noticed I needed to take breaks from music and from my practicing routine – and even playing! – every once in a while in order to keep my focus, my interest, and improve my productivity. I can easily get stuck in a certain way of playing or thinking about music. And then, what I usually do – maybe I won’t play for a couple of days, I’ll go read a book - not a musical book!, go to the movies, museums, parks, visit friends, etc. Usually these other things inspire me as much as music itself. To me, being a good performer and improviser is all about one’s ability to tell a good story, and captivate the audience.... So the more life

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years I let much of that go. It's hard to not do hobbies - and sports, particularly - to obsession. While the results were a healthy body and endorphins, I still felt that it left my mind speeding. I aspire to rekindle the practice as holistically as possible motivated by an upcoming move close to Manhattan's parks. My family and my girlfriend are unconditionally loving and accepting, which is a blessing. She and I aspire to learn to meditate, but in the meanwhile we simply try to keep each other laughing!

**JJ:** As a musician, what do you feel your role or responsibility is in our society?

**PM:** My responsibilities are to be honest, creative and inspiring. As difficult as it is to try to be a musician, it is a blessing, so I try to give it my all. I try to work hard and to do my best when I practice or perform and I try to empower others in whatever it is they are trying to accomplish or create for themselves in their lives. Through what they take away from my music or from spending time with me personally I think we artists are people who make our dreams and ideas our commodity. The best thing we can do is pass those empowering vibes, on.

**JJ:** With (1) the highly competitive current reality of this artform, (2) the compelling need on the part of many artists to be the center of attention and to be simultaneously and paradoxically selfless -- how do you avoid the tyranny of the ego?

**PM:** Truthfully, I wrestle with this. I feel that it hard to remain open, trusting and self empowered vs. competitive or self critical in the face of such a

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**WW:** For me the best example is the road that John Coltrane traveled. I think that at a certain point music and spirituality can't be separated and they become one and the same. As an individual gains more

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experiences you have, more fulfilling your stories are going to be!

**JJ:** As a musician, what do you feel your role or responsibility is in our society?

**MZ:** Music and Art should be as important in any society as all the other areas and subjects, such as health issues, politics, relationships, etc. I believe that Art can help us understand the society and the world where we all live - and consequently help us live a better and fulfilling life. In my original music, I try to keep this idea in mind as much as possible. So, for instance, through the combination of many influences and styles - such as Brazilian, Latin, Jazz, I am hoping to relate to the coexistence of these many cultures and people, and societies.

demanding business full of younger and younger virtuosos. I start by simply being honest with myself - and you and your readers - about that. But that said, all the angst hasn't ever taken me out of the game. I inevitably feel inspired to enjoy the great music that is here in New York at the club, and to continue to do what I know to do, which is to be myself, musically and otherwise and to appreciate the high level that is present.

**JJ:** What is the greatest compliment that you can receive as a musician?

**PM:** It is to be offered a gig or playing opportunity - especially in New York City. To have musicians regularly attend your gigs. When people thank you for the way your music makes them feel. When students or fellow players are inspired by what you do, and say so. When people are willing to spend their time and hard earned money on your performances and recordings.

**JJ:** If there is one for you, what is the connection between music and spirituality?

**PM:** I've addressed this in different ways, above. But I'll add that music is a form of meditation and channeling energy, be it source energy or our individual inner energy. I've never been religious in a formal way but of my most profound experiences in life have been listening to or playing music. Getting to deeper levels musically is really getting to deeper levels spiritually. Look at Wayne Shorter or Miles, people who in one note penetrate our deepest defenses. *Amazing*. That's not just notes on a page, needless to say. And we all are on our way to a deeper more realized place from where ever we begin in the process. ■

knowledge, he/she starts to realize how little they really know on a multitude of levels. This is when one is able to start the journey to self-awareness in music as well as life. I like the saying "You have to know what you don't know." ■

**JJ:** What is the greatest compliment that you can receive as a musician?

**MZ:** In my specific case, I get really happy when somebody says that I play "for the song". This is my ultimate goal, and the reason I am performing music. Nowadays it is very common to see drummers - and other instrumentalists too - prioritize speed, endurance, technique.... On many occasions the musical choices get put away in favor of a faster, more intricate and technical approach. I am not saying it is wrong to work on technique, and take our playing and abilities to the next level - we should do that! I know that there will be times when it will be perfectly musical and necessary to play something technically advanced - but the music should dictate where we should go and what choices to make. So I humbly try to serve the song, and contribute to a better pic-

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*"No, America, no jazz".*

— Art Blakey

**FOREIGN MUSICIANS IN AMERICA: THE ARTISTS VISA**



Victoria M. Ingber

Art Blakey would not be an example of a jazz Musician with the minimal level of success necessary to be eligible for an Artist Visa. For any foreigner interested in working in the US, certain strategies dictated by the US Immigration Service will result in an Artist Visa. The requirements for this type of visa, also known as the O-1 Visa are as follows:

**Foreign Musician will need at least 3 of the following:**

- CDS and demos;
- Performances at prestigious venues;
- Letters of recommendation written by experts in the field;
- Performances as lead in groups;
- Published announcements of gigs;
- Material published about foreign musician in magazines, newspapers, internet, etc;
- Membership in exclusive music organizations;
- Articles written by the foreign musician-in books, magazines, and newspapers, etc;
- Awards, certificates, honors, prizes; and / or
- High yearly income.

**US Orchestra, Symphony, Music Group, Representative, Agent or Manager will be needed to:**

- Sign all forms and petitions;
- Provide Tax ID Number or Social Security #;
- Provide basic information, such as address, email, phone numbers, etc. Beside those who are entering due to their excellence in the music field, there are musicians entitled to enter the US to work if they can be considered "culturally unique", such as Yoruban jazz musicians from West Africa.

Bear in mind that many books and articles on the subject are very long and written in crazy legalese. Immigration law can be understood best by a musician when tailored to the needs of the musician. When done correctly, the results are amazing.

**Victoria Ingber is an immigration attorney specializing in the arts for over 25 years. In addition to being an expert in the field of the transfer of foreign talent to the US, Mrs. Ingber is a voting member of New York Artists Equity Association, Inc. and the recipient of the 2003 National Leadership Award presented by the Presidential Committee for Women in Business. For questions: 212-686-3838; vingber@gmail.com.**

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ture of a certain "sonic vision". If that requires lots of 32<sup>nd</sup> notes, I will do my best to play those in a musical manner!

**JJ:** Could you share some ideas, quotes, or words of wisdom that you've received from a mentor or hero that has made an impact on your life and or artistry?

**MZ:** Sure. I think the most important thing for a musician/artist, specially a serious professional involved in jazz and improvised music, is to find his or hers own unique voice. It's okay to copy things in the

beginning and learn from others, but these things should be the means to an end. They should help us find our own thing. At the end of the day, we must have our own unique sound and approach to music, which will reveal our passion and our commitment to the art and will ultimately help us stand out.

Be open-minded and you will learn twice as much. I heard that many times, from many teachers and mentors. Don't put yourself in a box by limiting what you can experience. For example: listen to all kinds of music! There is always something new to learn, and we just never know what will inspire us to our next step in music and in life. ■

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**JJ:** As a musician, what do you feel your role or responsibility is in our society?

**TB:** Foremost we're entertainers. But I value highly when musicians/artist get together about certain projects. Most musicians share their political and social beliefs to a certain degree, so getting together for a cause can have a huge impact. I'm thinking about all the jazz concerts that were put together to support Obama for instance.

**JJ:** With (1) the highly competitive current reality of this artform, (2) the compelling need on the part of many artists to be the center of attention and to be simultaneously and paradoxically selfless - how do you avoid the tyranny of the ego?

**TB:** Well you do need a healthy ego. If you don't believe in yourself, it's hard to convince others to. But it's a constant balance and struggle between different personalities. On the outside you have to be positive and strong but you might really just feel down from a bad review. You can't please everyone but you're always exposing yourself. If your ego is down you have to push yourself back up, and if your ego is up you might have to get down again a little to not disappoint yourself.

**JJ:** What is the greatest compliment that you can receive as a musician?

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acting at 63 (another life-long dream) and that focus helped get through the period after 9/11 when jazz gigs in NY had become so few and far between and the music business felt so discouraging to me. With acting I felt at least I was still creating and opportunities were easier to come by.

**JJ:** Could you share some words of wisdom or discussions you've had with influential artists or mentors that have made an impact on your music and or the way you live your life?

**EF:** Bobby Darin was a best friend when we were teenagers. When he was taking theatre at Hunter College (no one knew he'd become a singer, not even him) and playing drums with a "combo," he was so confident of breaking through in the business. When

**TB:** Bill Barnes wrote on jazz on that my voice suggests a cross of a flugelhorn and a soprano sax. That's a huge compliment! I try to think of myself as an instrumentalist who happens to be a singer and not "just" a singer. I would have preferred the tenor or alto but maybe that'll get me to work on the low register some more! More broadly and less about technique could be the words from a listener, who might not even be a musician. Something like "your voice sounds like it comes straight from your heart and it goes right into my soul." That makes me very happy!

**JJ:** Could you share some ideas, quotes, or words of wisdom that you've received from a mentor or hero that has made an impact on your life and or artistry?

**TB:** Walter Beasley said in an ensemble class at Berkeley that if you can't do it slow, you can't do it fast. He meant in regards to playing. But it's really about your overall approach too. He had me sing "Save your love for me" for an entire semester - over and over. But by the end of that semester I understood how well you have to know the song and how much you have to really feel the song in order to be able to play it. It's not just learning the words, and one time through won't cut it.

**JJ:** If there is one for you, what is the connection between music and spirituality?

**TB:** I'm not spiritual. For me the connection is to the person itself, ones own spirit. ■

it happened, then expanded and expanded, I always thought of those early conversations and found them enormously inspiring - even do now. That, to this day, he's so huge in our genre, I find very revealing. He never gave up hope even when he was dead broke and nothing was happening.

**JJ:** With the highly competitive current reality of this artform, the compelling need on the part of many artists to be the center of attention and to be simultaneously and paradoxically selfless, how do you avoid the tyranny of the ego?

**EF:** Wow, that's huge! As Eckhart Tolle points out, everything that isn't essentially love or peace is ego. I try to point out to myself whenever I bump into anything that doesn't feel right or good or easy, that it's just that stuff and not "truth" (as Patrick calls it). ■

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of it as being some sort of magical antidote to problems that students face.

**JJ:** As an artist, your state of mind and ability to be at once focused, relaxed, intuitive and more is important. What do you do to recharge your batteries and decompress in the face of the stresses and distractions in our contemporary world?

**JA:** My wife and I have two beautiful young daughters, and they really help me recharge, stay focused, and keep at it. They also help me keep things in perspective. There isn't much time to sweat the small stuff with those two little monkeys running around.

**JJ:** With (1) the highly competitive current reality of this artform, (2) the compelling need on the part of many artists to be the center of attention and to be simultaneously and paradoxically selfless -- how do you avoid the tyranny of the ego?

**JA:** Ideally, the musician can keep the focus entirely on the music, which should keep even the most fluid player entirely humble. I think the greatest jazz players are usually self-less, and they give generously, with all their soul, so that others may sound their best. I'm not sure why, but I have never felt boastful about my own technique and artistry. I've kept it all about the music, and I really feel like I am only serving the music's needs. This may sound paradoxical, but I think an artist can be confident, self-critical, and entirely humble, all at the same time.

**JJ:** Could you share some ideas, quotes, or words of wisdom that you've received from a mentor or hero that has made an impact on your life and or artistry?

**JA:** I was fortunate to attend New England Conservatory, and between George Russell, Bob Brookmeyer, and Joe Maneri, I felt like I was surrounded by sages on a mountaintop! George Russell possessed the fiercest passion for music. The way that he would dance, his eyes sometimes shut, while we all played his music, was totally electrifying. He just taught me so much about maintaining a certain level of energy and zest for life. Brookmeyer taught me that precision really really matters, and all three emphasized the absolute significance and importance of integrity and honesty in music. If I am not composing or playing something that is honest, if I am cutting corners and failing to address the needs of the music, there really is nothing gained.

**JJ:** If there is one for you, what is the connection between music and spirituality?

**JA:** There is a power to music that transcends all else I have ever experienced. I first experienced this when I started composing music as a kid. The first time a band performed the pages I wrote, I knew there was some sort of music god looking down on all this somewhere. The collaboration between composer, performer and audience really gives music a life beyond me. I am constantly humbled by this. ■