

Dig Trio

By Brian Owens

Cover Article published on "Metronome Magazine" - June 2005

Formed by two talented musicians that hail from Brazil, guitarist Gustavo Assis Brasil and drummer Mauricio Zottarelli, the DigTrio incorporates their love for American rock, pop and jazz with their native influence of Brazilian music to create a truly unique listening experience. Meeting at Boston's prestigious Berklee College of Music, the two joined forces with an American, bassist David Pinto, recorded tracks in the Fall of 2002 and released the finished project in 2003.

The twelve track instrumental collection features a blazing interaction between the three musicians. Prolific songwriting, virtuosic technique and uncanny interplay punctuate the group's stunning debut album.

I had a chance to speak with drummer Mauricio Zottarelli about the DigTrio, their newest member, bassist Michael Farquharson, and their musical direction and influences. The following is a transcript of our conversation. Enjoy...

METRONOME: Where are you and Gustavo from?

We are both from Brazil. I am from a small city called Rio Claro. It is about two hours away from São Paulo which is the capital of my state. Gustavo's family is based down south in the city of Santa Maria.

METRONOME: Did you know one another while you lived in Brazil?

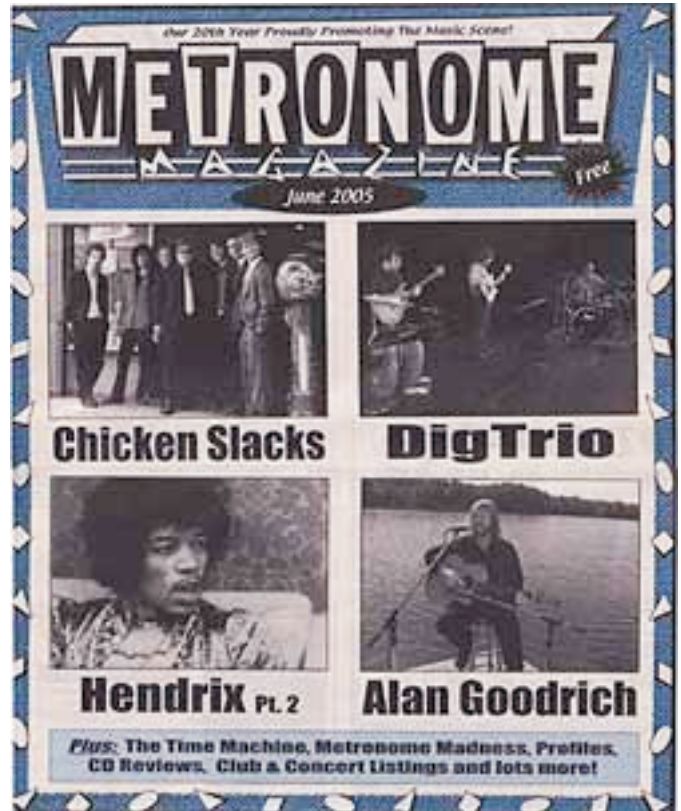
No. We actually met while we were going to Berklee College.

METRONOME: How and when did you form your band the DigTrio?

We met in the Fall of 1999. It was just a coincidence. Gustavo had just gotten here and I started going to Berklee that previous summer. He and I met on a recording session at Berklee for a student project. Gustavo had this band already happening in Brazil.

METRONOME: Was it called the DigTrio?

It was called the DigTrio but it was mostly his material. He had some original material and after



playing together we noticed that we had some common background as far as influences so we started playing together. He had a couple of original tunes that ended up being recorded for the album. So it started basically with the both of us.

METRONOME: Who was your bass player?

David Pinto was our original bass player. He joined the band a couple of weeks after I did.

METRONOME: Did you meet him at Berklee?

Gustavo studied with him. They had a class together. After we all graduated from Berklee we recorded a CD in 2002. In January of 2003, David moved to upstate New York. So we had to find another bass player.

METRONOME: Who replaced David?

His name is Michael Farquharson. He teaches at Berklee. Gustavo and I knew him from being students of his.

METRONOME: What does Michael teach at Berklee?

He teaches in the professional writing department. I personally had a class with him in audio production for composers and writers. Gustavo knew him because we all performed together. Gustavo and I got together and decided that we should ask him about it. He [Michael] was really in to it because he knew of our work. I had told him about the group and played some recordings that we had already done. He was always bugging us to play with us. When the opportunity came, I went and asked him and he was psyched to join the group. It was really an honor for us because I had such a great time having him as a teacher. I learned so much. He was one guy that we saw playing and said, "If we could ever get this guy to play with us..." and it actually worked out.

METRONOME: Was there a musical plan in putting together the DigTrio?

Gustavo had some idea more than anyone else. The first couple of tunes we played while David was still part of the group were mostly Gustavo's compositions. But after a couple of months of playing together we all started to contribute with arrangements and some other ideas as well.

METRONOME: So it grew the more you guys started playing with one another?

Exactly. It's kind of a coincidence too. I was playing a lot of pop stuff and singer/songwriters and rock, but up to that point I felt there was a void in my career. I wanted to be part of an instrumental group, but I never had the chance, so meeting Gustavo was very important to me because that hole in my musical career was filled. It really worked out.

METRONOME: If you could describe the DigTrio to someone that doesn't know you, how would you do it?

I always have problems with that. We have this jazz fusion influence and that's probably the best description of us. But we have some



Brazilian influences that are in there too.

METRONOME: That influence is definitely apparent and makes your sound so unique...

It's something that Gustavo and I grew up listening to. I can say for myself that I haven't played much Brazilian music, in Brazil especially. I was mostly in to rock and blues and funk stuff.

METRONOME: Who were some of the artists/bands that influenced you when you were younger?

It was mostly American music. In Brazil we have a lot of the stuff that's happening here. So I was really, really into blues, rock and funk.

METRONOME: Can you name a few artists?

At first, my main influence was Led Zeppelin. That's why basically I play the drums. Sometimes I put the video on that came out a couple of years ago and remind myself that's why I'm doing what I'm doing. But at that point I didn't really know much about jazz. I was really a rock player. Then some friends from my group there started talking about music and I felt the need to learn what they were talking about. I started listening to Chick Corea and some of the drummers that played with him. It was a big influence for me. When I came to Berklee, I started listening to more of the traditional jazz stuff which is part of what I'm doing now as well.

METRONOME: Is there anyone that Gustavo is deeply influenced by?

When I first met him he was crazy about a guitar player named Wayne Krantz. He has

performed with Steely Dan and taught at Berklee. Gustavo hears a lot of music and always comes up with something new. He's always aware of everything that's happening... and absorbing it all. We all try to be like that. Whatever we listen to, even if we don't particularly like it, it could be something that helps us as far as composing material for the trio, so we try to be as open as we can.

METRONOME: When did you record your self-titled album DigTrio?

We started talking about it during the spring of 2002. So during that whole summer and 2/3 of the Fall we just practiced, rehearsed and did some gigs. We wanted to record the album live. That was the whole idea behind the album, so we knew we had to interact with each other to the best of our ability. We had two days for the recording and we were lucky. We had twenty hours total and recorded the whole album.

METRONOME: Where did you record the CD?

It was at Solstice Studio in Stoughton, Massachusetts.

METRONOME: Who engineered the sessions?

His name is Joe Clapp.

METRONOME: How did you meet Joe?

I met Joe through another project that I'm part of... the Matt Chase Group. We had recorded with Joe a couple of times in the past, and from the first session, I really liked the way Joe worked. He was super professional, and laid back, and an awesome guy to work with. So I suggested to Gustavo and David to use Joe.

METRONOME: Tell me about your association with Sarah Brindell. I understand you're her drummer?

I've been doing that for almost as long as the trio. She moved here in 2001. It's a funny thing... She told me she passed by one of the Berklee recital halls and heard me play and asked for my information. I don't remember that. She had my information and then she lost it. Then, she was looking for a drummer a couple of months later and somebody suggested my name. I guess it was one of those things that was meant to happen. When

we met she said, "I know you." It took her a while to put two and two together. We have been playing ever since.

METRONOME: You enjoy playing with her...

I love it. It's great because all these groups have some common things but in general they're very different from each other.

METRONOME: That's very challenging and keeps you on your toes...

It is definitely. That's the thing the I like the most, to try to do a bunch of different things. I think it helps you develop as a musician. That goes for the other two guys as well. Michael has been doing music all his life. He was a very in-demand studio performer in Canada. He recorded jingles and albums and he was a producer. He worked pretty much full time as a studio musician before coming to Boston.

METRONOME: What kind of bass does Michael play?

Michael has two basses that he uses. They are both Yamaha DB1200s. One is fretted, the other one is fretless.

METRONOME: What kind of bass rig does he play through?

A Gallien Kruger 800RB head through an Ampeg 4x12 cab.

METRONOME: What kind of drum set do you play?

It's a Pearl Master Studio set.

METRONOME: What kind of cymbals do you play?

I have a bunch of different ones and I'm always changing because I do a lot of studio work as well. For particular projects, some cymbals are better than others for the studio, so I'm always switching back and forth. I have a couple of cymbals from Istanbul. I'd like to get some more cymbals from this company. I found this one cymbal in Brazil while I was visiting my family a long time ago. I have a friend that owns a store there and he called me and said, "You've got to come and see this cymbal." Apparently this guy just wanted to give the cymbal away. He didn't care at all. I thought, even if it's not that good, let me have it! I still use it for most everything that I do.

METRONOME: What kind of guitar does Gustavo play?

He has a couple of different ones but the one he's been using a lot is a Paul Reed Smith McCarty

model. He used a Telecaster Nashville model with a B-Bender a lot for the recording.

METRONOME: That's an unusual guitar for jazz fusion...

I remember he liked it very much. Those are the two he uses a lot.

METRONOME: What are some of the plans you have for the DigTrio for the next six to twelve months?

We want to get Michael in the studio with us. He is a very prolific composer. We don't have any gigs lined up for the next month or so because Gustavo may be going to Brazil. He's doing a movie soundtrack. His father is a famous movie director in Brazil.

METRONOME: What is his father's name and what is the name of the movie?

His name is Sergio Assis-Brasil. The name of the movie is *Manhã Transfigurada* which translates to Transfigured Morning.

METRONOME: How many songs do you have planned for the new album? Ten or twelve?

We don't have that much yet but I think that would be the goal. To have around eleven or twelve tunes.

METRONOME: Once again, would it be all instrumentals, or would you have a guest vocalist like Sarah Brindell come in and sing a song or two?

We could do that. My wife is also a singer. She's a Brazilian singer. We have another group that we play in. A Brazilian jazz group.

METRONOME: Tell us about it...

The group is called Borandá.

METRONOME: What is the English translation for Borandá?

It's the Brazilian slang for "Let's Go." There's also a famous tune by a Brazilian composer that's called "Borandá," so we decided to use that name. In that group we do a bunch of Brazilian jazz standards, Jobim tunes and some other famous pop songs but we do our own arrangements on them. Sometimes it sounds like the trio because it's Gustavo and I playing again but we try to not sound like the trio. He uses a classical guitar a lot of the time and we have an acoustic bass player.

METRONOME: Where are some of the places you

perform with that act?

We're actually doing a show at the MFA in June. We've done a couple of shows at the Zeitgeist Gallery and we've done some private parties and weddings.

METRONOME: What are some of the things you have learned by playing with the DigTrio?

The most important thing I guess is that we try to be versatile and open to everything that's going on. Even if a particular style doesn't appeal to you, it could have something that could make your playing evolve or inspire you to do something else. I've learned that, but I still don't think I'm behind it 100%. But I noticed that the more open I am, the more opportunities are brought to me as a musician.

METRONOME: So there are no big shows coming up this summer with the DigTrio?

No, not with the DigTrio. There are some shows coming up with Sarah Brindell and some of the other bands I mentioned. We are doing a gig with the Brazilian group at the MFA on June 3rd. On the 11th, I'm playing with the Matt Chase Group at Mount Blue in Norwell. We've done a couple of shows there and last year we bumped into Steven Tyler [Editor's note: Aerosmith's Steven Tyler is co-owner of Mount Blue in Norwell, Massachusetts along with Aerosmith's Joe Perry, Jayne Bowe and Lee Kennedy]. We were loading the equipment in and he was standing at the door. I was speechless. English is not my first language but when I get nervous I can't even talk in Portuguese (laughing)! That was cool.

For more on the DigTrio, check out the band's informative web site at www.digtrio.com.