



SANDY CRESSMAN

Biography

While many an American jazz singer flirts with the Brazilian Songbook, San Francisco vocalist **Sandy Cressman** made a name for herself as a true devotee of the country's greatest contemporary composers, interpreting songs by post-bossa masters like Milton Nascimento, Hermeto Pascoal, Gilberto Gil, and Filó Machado in Rio-accented Portuguese. The friendships forged with Brazilian musicians during her musical travels course through her captivating new album *Entre Amigos*, a project that marks a major new chapter for Cressman as a tunesmith. *Entre Amigos* features a gorgeous array of new songs created with a far-flung cast of collaborators, including the celebrated Pernambuco frevo composer/bandleader Spok, rising Brazilian-American guitarist Ian Faquini, pianist/composer Jovino Santos Neto, and pianist Antonio Adolfo, a Brazilian jazz master who got his start at the center of Rio's early 1960s bossa nova scene.

"All these years of delving into Brazilian music gave me great opportunities to meet and sing with a lot of interesting musicians," Cressman says. "For a long while I concentrated on mining the treasures in the existing repertoire. But at a certain point I started writing and asking people to collaborate, and *Entre Amigos* collects many of these amazing connections."

Her first new album since 2005's celebrated *Brasil—Sempre no Coração*, a project devoted to definitive songs by masters of MPB (*música popular brasileira*), Cressman never stepped away from music. As an educator and linchpin of a bustling creative family including her husband, former longtime Santana trombonist and recording engineer **Jeff Cressman**; their older daughter, New York trombonist/vocalist **Natalie Cressman**; and their younger daughter, Los Angeles dancer **Julianna Cressman**, she's maintained deep musical ties with some of the region's finest musicians. There's nothing quite like being massively overscheduled to concentrate one's attention, and Cressman came up with an enthralling set of answers to the self-searching question, "What do I really want to do with this music?"

The album opens with "**Como Eu Quero Cantar**," a brisk and alluring song she wrote with Dani and Debora Gurgel, who lead a celebrated samba jazz quartet in São Paulo. Their online acquaintanceship blossomed into a creatively charged friendship when Debora, an acclaimed pianist, and her daughter, vocalist Dani, stayed with the Cressmans after Sandy facilitated their Bay Area debut performance at Yoshi's. "From the first it felt like family," Cressman says. "For this song Dani and I sent iPhone recordings back and forth, then finished the piece in São Paulo when Debora sat at the piano and arranged the song. We recorded the song the next day; it was magical," including the first of several beautifully crafted trombone solos by Jeff Cressman.

Magical hardly begins to describe the connection Cressman forged with Spok, the arranger/composer and saxophonist who leads the magnificent Spok Frevo Orquestra in Recife.

The Cressmans met him at Brazil Camp in Cazadero, California, where Sandy translated and Jeff played for his classes over several seasons, responsibilities that immersed them in frevo for three hours a day. At his invitation, they ended up performing with the Orquestra at Carnaval 2015 on the main stage. The transcendent experience inspired Cressman to write “**Não Me Acorde Não**,” which Spok arranged and Cressman recorded in Recife with members of his horn-driven band.

Cressman also draws on the wealth of Brazilian musicians who have settled on the West Coast (including the drum great Celso Alberti). Award-winning Seattle-based pianist Jovino Santos Neto collaborated on “**Para Hermeto**,” a gorgeous dreamscape that powerfully evokes its namesake, Neto’s former employer Hermeto Pascoal. And the Brazilian-born, Berkeley-raised guitarist Ian Faquini, a rapidly rising force on the Bay Area scene, collaborated on the soaring Nascimentoian duet “**Nossa História**” (with lyrics by Sandy) and surging “**Deixa O Amor Florecer**,” which features horns arranged by Natalie Cressman and a particularly exquisite tenor solo by reed expert Harvey Wainapel.

A founding member of Cressman’s **Homenagem Brasileira** band, Wainapel is a similarly besotted Brazilophile, one of half a dozen Brazilian music acolytes who share Cressman’s passion. Recorded mostly in Jeff Cressman’s San Francisco studio, the album maintains a seamless feel by virtue of two well-oiled rhythm section tandems. Alberti and bassist David Belove have played with Cressman for years in **Homenagem Brasileira**, and the unrelated but oft-paired Scott and Phil Thompson (on bass and drums, respectively) have played together with Marcos Silva, Toninho Horta, Leny Andrade, and Chico Pinheiro. Argentine-born guitarist Hugo Wainzinger collaborated on two exquisite songs. And percussion maestro Michael Spiro, known for his mastery of numerous African diaspora rhythmic traditions, provides inspired support throughout.

“**Ela É**” is a piece she recorded in Germany with the formidable 2010 Santana rhythm section. While Dennis Chambers isn’t versed in Brazilian rhythms, he lays down a supple pulse, and the track feels like another ripple on Cressman’s ever-expanding Brazilian sea. “I’m thrilled that my musical horizons are widening,” she says. “For many years I was very Rio-centric, focused on bossa nova, samba, and Brazilian jazz. This record has São Paulo samba jazz, Northeastern rhythms frevo and maracatu. I keep meeting these people who have different areas of expertise and knowledge, and it’s so inspiring and invigorating to be involved in the creation of these songs.”

Born in the Bronx but raised from childhood in San Jose, **Sandy Cressman** began studying jazz while attending U.C. Berkeley in the early ’80s as a French major. After spending a year in France she returned to the Bay Area and helped assemble the four-woman vocal group **Pastiche**. At first modeled on the Manhattan Transfer, the group evolved over several years into a jazz/pop ensemble drawing on a wide range of vocal styles.

Along the way, Cressman began her love affair with Brazilian sounds. Already intrigued by the music of Flora Purim and Airto, Milton Nascimento, and Tania Maria, she was totally captivated by a tape of the funky Brazilian singer/songwriter Djavan she heard while touring with Pastiche in Japan. In the mid-’80s, she began studying Portuguese and Brazilian percussion at San Jose State, where she majored in vocal jazz. By the early ’90s, Brazilian music had become such an important part of Cressman’s life that she listened to Dori Caymmi albums while giving birth to her two daughters.

“I had more than 24 hours of labor with my first child,” Cressman says, “and doctors and the nurses kept coming in and out of our room saying, ‘You’re definitely playing the best music in

this hospital. If I hear any more George Winston I'm going to die.”

A long-running duo gig with Rio-born jazz pianist/composer **Marcos Silva** at Cafe Bastille in San Francisco enabled Cressman to expand her repertoire of Brazilian songs. He helped her prepare a quartet for her 1997 debut gig at Yoshi's, and the sold-out show led to the creation of **Homenagem Brasileira**. She started performing widely with the group after Bud Spangler broadcast a tape of the Yoshi's gig on his KCSM radio show "Sunday Night Suites"; the group's self-titled CD debut appeared in 1999.

She continues to work with **Homenagem Brasileira**, as well as **Mistura Fina**, a more recent Latin jazz combo led by guitarist Ray Obiedo (a longtime collaborator with whom she co-wrote the song "**Eu Mais Você**"). In recent months she's collaborated with the acclaimed 17-piece Electric Squeezebox Orchestra led by trumpeter Erik Jekabson, performed with world jazz pioneer Jai Uttal, and celebrated the music of Guinga with Faquini and flutist Rebecca Kleinmann. Somehow, every path seems to lead her back to Brazil. "People find things in other cultures they identify with for unexplainable reasons," Cressman says. "Maybe I was Brazilian in another life."

Whatever her past, Cressman's new music stakes a bold claim to her Brazilian future. •

Sandy Cressman: *Entre Amigos*

(Cressman Music)

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EPK: <https://youtu.be/qaQi6JNOx8U>

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