

Joyce Moreno

It's difficult to know where to begin with the Brazilian artist now formally known by her married name of Joyce Moreno. That glorious voice? Or the guitar playing, described by Caetano Veloso as 'like the best'? Or the 400 or more songs she has penned over a long career? Should we first consider Joyce the pioneering musical feminist, or Joyce the journalist, author, teacher and TV presenter? Or work back from the four Latin Grammy nominations and a Brazilian International Lifetime Achievement Award? No wonder Antonio Carlos Jobim exclaimed 'What an amazing woman!' in his sleeve notes to Joyce's first of two tributes to the great composer.

Joyce herself would probably laugh it all off. It's 45 years and over 30 albums since her eponymous debut in 1968, and her infectious good humour no doubt sustains such a productive career. Bombast and pretention appear alien to her nature. Asked whether the name-change in 2009 symbolised a certain artistic maturity, Joyce quipped, 'I just happened to Google myself and all I could find was a lot of James Joyce before I could find "Joyce, Brazilian singer". I figured it would be easier if I used my family name.'

Any single CD by Joyce Moreno rewards you with breezy melodies, delivered with almost casual panache and consummate musicianship. Songs in the key of life sung in a pitch-perfect voice that makes you feel better about the world. Talking of the early *Água e Luz*, Joyce described how 'all we wanted was the joy of the music itself, the fun, the creative work. Music was our wage'.

Outside Brazil, this authentic global artist has recorded her joyful music in New York, Paris, Rome and Tokyo. London and Cologne have also come to qualify as homes-from-home. But wherever she lays her guitar, her music transports you unflinchingly to her birthplace and hometown of Rio de Janeiro. 'Rio de Janeiro – the mountain, the sun and the sea – where I make my samba simply.'

She was born Joyce Silveira Palhano de Jesus on 31 January 1948. Raised in Rio's prosperous Zona Sul, not far from Copacabana beach, she attended school in Ipanema. Her older brother played guitar semi-professionally and the young Joyce grew up listening to 'a lot of jazz music, as well as the rising bossa and also traditional samba'. So it seems inevitable that she should one day take up the mantle of her main local influences: Jobim, João Gilberto and Vinícius de Moraes.

By the age of 18, having already recorded jingles and composed her first songs, she was teaching guitar and undertaking formal music lessons while studying journalism as a fall-back career if she failed to make it as a musician. In 1967, her entry for a music competition, 'Me Disseram', fuelled controversy with its 'vulgar and immoral' supposed 'feminist posture'. In fact, Joyce was merely expressing herself in her own first-person voice and gender, as learned from the likes of Billie Holiday. This, though, was the dawn of the repressive military dictatorship, which would drive some of her contemporaries into exile.

In some ways, her initial 1968 recording created the template for all that would follow: roughly half her own songs and half her interpretations of others' – in this case, originals by such emerging talents as Veloso, Paulinho da Viola and Marcos Valle. Over the years, Joyce would release albums dedicated to the work of Jobim, Moraes and Wilson Batista. 1998's *Astronauta* was a set of songs associated with her friend and illustrious contemporary, Elis Regina. Recorded in New York with a band of Brazilian musicians and American jazz artists of the calibre of saxophonist Joe Lovano, it earned Joyce her first Latin Grammy nomination.

Back in 1977, during a six-month engagement in the same city, Joyce recorded *Natureza* with another group of celebrated jazz musicians for producer Claus Ogerman. Although the album would never see the light of day (a fate that might have befallen the exquisite *Visions of Dawn* [reviewed in *Songlines* #], recorded the previous year in Paris with her friends, Maurício Maestro and ace percussionist Naná Vasconcelos, had not the UK's Far Out label resurrected it for posterity), she met there her lifelong collaborator and partner, drummer Tutty Moreno. Their daughter, Mariana, was born in 1979. The following year, 'Clareana', Joyce's lullaby to her two daughters with ex-husband, composer Nelson Angelo, became her first big commercial hit and one of several stand-out tracks on her seminal *Feminina*.

Collaborations – with the likes of Tutty Moreno, arranger, composer, guitarist and singer, Dori Caymmi, and more recently keyboard wizard, João Donato – have been another artistic hallmark. Were they, I wondered, more satisfying than her 'solo' projects? 'Not really,' Joyce replied. 'It's just that I'm a very gregarious person. I love team work. Friendship, companionship, having fun together, that's what this is about.'

Over the last three decades, the gregarious polymath found time between regular album releases for stage collaborations, a book of musical memoirs, a weekly newspaper column, regular tours of Europe and Japan, international music workshops and TV contributions such as *Cantos do Rio*, an acclaimed series that spotlighted the city's most celebrated musicians.

Now in her mid 60s, Joyce's multi-faceted diary is still full. Her next extensive European tour is scheduled for 2015. Her latest (2013) album, *Tudo*, was reviewed in *Songlines* #93. As her voice seems to mature like a fine wine, growing ever more expressive and tonally more subtle, each new release becomes Joyce's personal favourite. But even if she couldn't scat like Ella Fitzgerald or play the guitar like João Gilberto, her songs alone would secure her place in the pantheon of *Música Popular Brasileira*. Actually, the singer prefers her own label of MCB – Creative Music of Brazil – to MPB: one she considers de-valued by overuse.

Whatever the label used, Joyce Moreno continues to breathe creative life into a genre that some might dismiss as moribund. Comparisons can be invidious, but Caetano Veloso suggests that 'Elis [Regina] is the most musician-like singer who reached stardom in Brazil, and Joyce is the best musician among the women singers who came after'.

© Mark Sampson, December 2013

RECOMMENDED ALBUMS

Feminina (EMI-Odéon, 1980)

Joyce cites the album that really brought her to fame as her most representative. It includes 'Clareana', the beautiful 'Mistérios' and 'Aldeia De Ogum', which would later become a hit on the London music scene and be sampled by The Black Eyed Peas.

Just A Little Bit Crazy (Far Out Recordings, 2004)

Joyce received her fourth Latin Grammy nomination for this collaboration with nu-jazz keyboard star, Bugge Wesseltoft. Featuring mainly her own songs, it also includes the most somnolent version imaginable of The Fab Four's 'A Hard Day's Night'.

Rio De Janeiro (Far Out Recordings, 2011)

The quintessence of Joyce: just voice, acoustic guitar and a diverse collection of songs inspired by Rio, recorded to commemorate a solo concert she'd given the year before on Ipanema beach.

COMPILATIONS

The Essential Joyce, 1970 – 1996 (Mr. Bongo, 1997)

Of the various compilations over time, Joyce suggests this one. It offers four tracks from *Feminina* and a useful overview of her early career.

LIKE JOYCE? THEN TRY... LAURA LOPEZ CASTRO

Laura López Castro *Inventan El Ser Feliz* (Nesola, 2007)

Recorded in Berlin with composer and guitarist, Don Philippe, the young German-based Spanish singer acknowledges many of Joyce's influences and contemporaries. While the bossa-jazz oeuvre is similar, the minor-key is predominant. Melancholia has rarely been so delicious.