

# innocentia maria mendes

## Biography

The first thing that strikes you about Maria Mendes is the purity of her tone and her graceful, lyrical phrasing. She glides over her band, adding emphasis here, lingering there, scatting in unexpected directions and occasionally soaring to a heady high when the mood takes her. Clearly, she has spent time on her craft.

Born in Portugal and classically trained from the age of 12, it was at Codarts University (in her adopted home of Rotterdam) that the long-time classical music enthusiast decided to explore her connection to Brazil through jazz improvisation. There she would join the dots between Western standards by the likes of Ella Fitzgerald, Charlie Parker and Betty Carter, and the freer, percussive styles of Brazil – artists such as Hermeto Pascoal, for instance. Listen closely and you will also hear Shirley Horn's deft use of silence, and the precision and spoken melodies of Carmen McRae.

Periods of study and training followed in Brussels, New York and Rio. Then came a series of commanding performances and prizes in several international competitions such as Montreux Jazz Vocal competition. In 2012, debut album *Along the Road* (Dot Time records) announced her arrival on the world stage as a vocalist with a unique touch – world tour including Blue Note Jazz Club NY, Montreux Jazz Festival, SESC Pompéia São Paulo and Casa da Música Porto, to name a few). Original composition 'Saia Preta', inspired by a saudade-soaked taxi ride through Rio de Janeiro, revealed Mendes' potential as a songwriter, not to mention the deep affection that she has for her mother's homeland. Musicians and critics were lining up to praise her ... even legends. Quincy Jones had this to say about Mendes: "I see a promising, shining future for this young talented singer."

Backing her every step of the way – from the recording studio to the Blue Note in New York – is her highly attuned band of Dutch all-stars: **Karel Boehlee** on piano (Toots Thielemans Band, Hein van de Gein Trio); **Clemens van der Feen** on acoustic bass (Franz van Chossy Trio, Jesse van Ruller Trio) and **Jasper van Hulten** on drums (Eric Vloeimans, Tuto Puoane Band). Thankfully, Mendes has kept faith with the same team and together with her close collaborator **Martin Fondse**, the highly acclaimed composer and pianist, they have conceived follow-up album *Innocentia* for your pleasure.

More exhilarating and emotionally complex than its predecessor – think lazy summer days in the throes of childhood or the finding hope in moments of despair – *Innocentia* also features virtuoso clarinet player **Anat Cohen** from Israel. There are many high points to savour. A rendition of 'When You Wish Upon a Star' sets the standard free from its occasionally mawkish confines as Boehlee ups the tempo and embarks on a Glasper-esque excursion.

Then there's Mendes dueling with drummer van Hulten on Hermeto's 'O Ovo' before a mischievous Cohen muscles in and almost steals the show. Elsewhere Mendes demonstrates that she's a highly capable scat singer a la Ella on 'Água de Beber'. And let's not forget their version of Portuguese composer Heitor Villa-Lobos' 'Bachianas Brasileiras Nr 5 (Cantilena)', featuring some lovely lyrical interplay between Mendes and Cohen.

The album also features imaginative readings of songs by the likes of Sting and Jimmy

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Woode – not your typical bedfellows. That is another hallmark of Mendes. She is open and inquisitive when it comes to her music, yet able to put her stamp on a tune, whether it is sung in English or Portuguese. ‘Fragile’ is typical of the mood of this album – wistful, rooted in innocence and vulnerability.

*Innocentia* is a marked progression in the career of Mendes. Under the guidance of composer and close collaborator Martin Fondse, she has obviously grown as a composer and bandleader, and not just a vocalist. But it is as a performer that she truly excels, moving the listener ... stirring the soul. Press play, catch her in concert and prepare to be quietly stunned by her depth of emotion.

Concert Line up: Maria Mendes (vocals), Steven Kamperman (clarinets), Karel Boehlee (piano), Jasper Somsen (acoustic bass), Jasper van Hulten (drums)

CD Line up: Maria Mendes (vocals), Anat Cohen (clarinets), Karel Boehlee (piano), Clemens van der Feen (acoustic bass), Jasper van Hulten (drums)

## Press quotes

- "... with her clear voice and her own style the perfect vocal jazz album has arrived" TELEGRAPH (Netherlands)
- "Sultry, perfectly timed Bossa Jazz" NRC (Netherlands)
- "Mendes immediately profiles herself as a strong jazz singer. Intimacy and beauty from the first track" JAZZISM (Netherlands)
- "What Mendes express with her voice is art and a real treat for the heart and ears. Impressive!" DRAAI OM JE OREN (Netherlands)
- "Her vocally shows it all, really perfect" JAZZZINE.NL (Netherlands)
- "Maria Mendes singing charms anyone" JAZZ À FIT (France)
- "Magical voice and virtuoso vocal improvisations. Sensitive" DFB MUSICA MAERZ (Germany)
- "No focus on trends. Sophisticated voice and high class band" OHRENSCHMAUCH (Germany)
- "Mendes makes clear she has absolutely nothing to prove" ALL ABOUT JAZZ (USA)
- "Gently beautiful. Excellent album" SERAI MUSIC MAGAZINE (Japan)
- 4 1/2\*\*\*\* JAZZISM (Netherlands)
- 5\*\*\*\*\* O GLOBO (Brazil)

## Jazz legends quotes

- "I see a promising shining future for this young talented singer" QUINCY JONES (USA)
- "Beautiful singing and great scat" HERMETO PASCOAL (Brazil)
- "An album sung from the heart" SHEILA JORDAN (USA)
- "Maria Mendes singing is wonderful" DORI CAYMMI (Brazil)
- "I hope her crystal-clear voice and her precise diction will conquer your hearts like it did mine" DAVID LINX (Belgium)
- "Her crystal-clear voice, perfect tuning and smoothness are unique" ROSA PASSOS (Brazil)

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Significant awards

- Montreux Jazz Voice Competition Award, SWITZERLAND | 2010 (president of the jury was jazz legend Quincy Jones)
- Best Improvisation Award at the Jazz Voices International competition, LITHUANIA | 2010
- Best Jazz Vocalist Award at the Jazz Voices International competition, LITHUANIA | 2010
- Best Jazz Vocalist Award at the Nederlands Jazz Vocalisten Concours, HOLLAND | 2009
- Prix du Port Award, HOLLAND | 2009
- Brussels Young Jazz Singers Competition Award, BELGIUM | 2008