**Maria Mendes**

***Close To Me***

***Bio***

**Maria Mendes** is a Grammy and Latin Grammy award nominated Jazz singer – in heart and soul. She has studied in New York, Brussels, Rotterdam and Porto – her talents have been praised by musical legends such as Quincy Jones and Hermeto Pascoal. However, for her latest album, she explores a completely different genre, Fado from her native Portugal. The results of this unique adaption are surprising and refreshing and thoroughly engaging.

"A symphonic Jazz approach to Fado", is how singer-songwriter Maria Mendes describes the music on her new album ***Close To Me***, awarded with the Edison Jazz 2020 prize for Best Jazz Vocal Album. "It is not Fado," she immediately emphasizes. "I only used the music and poetry from this genre, but made a completely personal interpretation of it, with new arrangements." In addition, she wrote her own songs, all in the spirit of the genre of her motherland. Although Mendes has been living in the Netherlands for several years, her connection to Portugal remains strong, it is where Fado is anchored, in the soul of the country. Her love for the genre began at an early age, as a child, she heard the melancholic, dramatic sounds every day on the bus that took her home from school. "The first time I was really touched by it was when I was 18, when I heard Mariza sing *Barco Negro*" says Mendes. It is one of the most loved fado songs and especially known in the voice of Amália Rodrigues, the greatest fado queen. "Fado is in our identity," explains Maria. "It is our way to evoke "saudade": longing for the past and hoping it becomes present once again. But it is also universal: we all have those feelings in life."

The idea for ***Close To Me*** gained shape at a festival in the Netherlands, the Dag van de Rotterdamse Jazz. There, in the context of a musical assignment commissioned to her by the festival, Mendes combined the harmonies and melodies of two folk songs; the Portuguese *Barco Negro* and the Dutch *Ketelbinkie*. The reactions from the press and the public were so enthusiastic that the singer decided to investigate whether she could also master other fado songs through jazz arrangements. She started working on the repertoire of the Portuguese greats such as Carlos Paredes and Amália Rodrigues and, inspired by their work, also wrote her own songs in which she explores her love for Jazz with her affection for Portugal. Moreover, one of her musical gurus, the Brazilian legend Hermeto Pascoal wrote a fado especially for her.

Mendes did not settle for less with this album. Backing her every step of the way is her band of top Dutch jazz musicians: Karel Boehlee on piano, Jasper Somsen on acoustic bass and Jasper van Hulten on drums and percussion. In addition, she collaborated with the famous multi Grammy Award winning **Metropole Orkest** (the world’s leading Jazz symphonic orchestra) - in a chamber line up of thirty musicians, led by conductor, Grammy winner Jazz arranger and pianist **John Beasley**, who not only produced the album, but also played the keyboards and wrote the orchestrations.

**Close To Me**, Maria’s third album will be released internationally on Justin Time Records. Her previous releases include her 2012 debut *Along The Road* (Dot Time Records NY) and in 2015 she released the successor, *Innocentia* (Sony Music Portugal). In recent years, she has completed several successful tours with performances all over the world, including the prestigious concert halls: Concertgebouw (Amsterdam), Blue Note Jazz Club (New York) and the North Sea and Montreux Jazz festivals.

With her new project, Mendes hopes to attract a wider audience. "This album is a gift for the avid listener," she says. “For people who have an eclectic taste. I don't know what the Fado audience will think of it, but I hope they'll listen and appreciate the respectful and refreshing approach I have given to these beautiful songs.”

***Press Quotes***

**USA:**

“A jazz singer of the highest order. Her poise is as impressive as her power” DOWNBEAT

“Nothing here disappoints! Graceful vocalist” JAZZTIMES

“Priming need not be provided to understand the beauty of Close To Me” ALL ABOUT JAZZ

**NETHERLANDS:**

“Mendes’ voice and improvisation are paramount art ” NRC

“You hear the merging of Fado in all elegantly swirling notes, while the music gets wings through Mendes’ great sense of timing and well-dosed scat ” DE VOLKSKRANT

“Mendes immediately profiles herself as a strong jazz singer. Intimacy and beauty from the first track” JAZZISM

“What Mendes express with her voice is art and a real treat for the heart and ears. Impressive!” DRAAI OM JE OREN

“Her vocalically shows it all, really perfect” JAZZZINE.NL

**GERMANY:**

“Portuguese jazz singer Maria Mendes comes up with a Fado album of superlatives” JAZZTHING

“Portuguese jazz singer Maria Mendes comes up with a Fado album of superlatives” JAZZTHING

**UK:**

“Crystal clear voice, strong and confident (…) has the courage to make the classic Fado sound absolutely contemporary and of the moment” JAZZVIEWS

**SWITZERLAND:**

 “Longing, love, nostalgia are the themes, performed with a voice that is unsurpassed in purity and variability” JAZZ ’N’ MORE

**AUSTRIA:**

“Mendes is one of the most promising voices of the European jazz scene” CONCERTO MAG

**BELGIUM:**

“Breathtaking. A dazzling version of a versatile ode to Fado” JAZZHALO

**FRANCE:**

“Maria Mendes singing charms anyone” JAZZ À FIT

**JAPAN:**

“Gently beautiful. Excellent album” SERAI MUSIC MAGAZINE

**BRAZIL:** 5\*\*\*\*\* O GLOBO

***Quotes by the Team***

**METROPOLE ORKEST:** "As Metropole Orkest we are always looking to combine music styles. This project intelligently combines Fado and Jazz in a well-balanced and vibrant manner. John Beasley’s charts are rich and his work on this recording can be compared to that of a great fashion designer. Maria, her incredible voice and her songs are his muse in creating a garment that fits perfectly and makes the Metropole Orkest shine.”

**JOHN BEASLEY:** “Fado music needs an impressionistic voice that can express the longing and loss in these stories of melancholy. Maria Mendes surprised me with her stunning timbre of voice. She also has the charisma and personality that is needed to connect the music to the words and context of the songs.

My heart opened up making this album “Close to Me” with Maria, her band and the voluptuous orchestral sounds from the Metropole Orkest. Maria gave me the license to reimagine these classic fado songs with modern jazz sensibilities. I was captivated by the story lines and my film-composing instinct kicked in leading me to score each song like a movie. And, with Maria’s soul-reaching voice, which is clear as a bell and can trigger a wide range of feelings, when you listen, you are left with how to handle the beauty and artistry of what you just experienced.

Listening back to the album, I hear how elastic and open minded the musicians were with our writing. They took what we wrote beyond our imagination.

With “Close to Me”, you hear two genres –fado and jazz– infusing each other creating a new blend –a new musical appetite that stirs your soul.”

***Line Up***

Maria Mendes (vocals, composer and arranger)

John Beasley (arranger/orchestrator, keys, producer, Metropole Orkest’s conductor)

Karel Boehlee (piano)

Jasper Somsen (acoustic bass)

Jasper van Hulten (drums/percussion)

Metropole Orkest (chamber orchestra line up)

Vincent Houdijk (vibraphone)

***Songs***

Tudo Isto é Fado (Amália Rodrigues)

Foi Deus (Amália Rodrigues)

Asas Fechadas (Amália Rodrigues) – feat. Metropole Orkest

Há Uma Música do Povo (Mariza) – feat. Metropole Orkest

E Se Não For Fado (Mafalda Arnauth)

Tempo Emotivo (Maria Mendes) – inspired by Carlos Paredes’s “Movimento Perpétuo”– feat. Vincent Houdijk

Verdes Anos (Carlos Paredes)

Fado da Invejosa (Maria Mendes) – feat. Metropole Orkest

Dança do Amor (Maria Mendes)

Hermeto’s Fado (Hermeto Pascoal)

Barco Negro (Amália Rodrigues) – feat. Metropole Orkest

***Relevant Collaborations***

**Metropole Orkest** | Chamber line up on Close to Me project & tour 2019-2021

**John Beasley** | arranger, pianist, producer and the Metropole Orkest’s conductor for Close to Me project & tour 2019-2021

**Brussels Jazz Orchestra** | Big Band on De Bijloke project 2017

**Andre Ceccareli** | Drummer on Innocentia tour 2017

**Anat Cohen** | Clarinetist on Innocentia project 2015

**Martin Fondse** | Arranger on Innocentia project 2015

**Steven Kamperman**, **Alex Simu** & **Ricardo Toscano** | Clarinetists on Innocentia tour 2015-2018

***Relevant Concerts***

**2019**: Bimhuis NETHERLANDS

Tivoli Vredenburg NETHERLANDS

Lantaren Venster NETHERLANDS

Paradox NETHERLANDS

AINSI NETHERLANDS

Casa da Música PORTUGAL

Teatro São Luiz PORTUGAL

**2018**: Handelsbeurs BELGIUM

Het Concertgebouw NETHERLANDS

**2017**: De Bijloke BELGIUM

Amersfoort Jazz Festival NETHERLANDS

**2016**: North Sea Jazz Festival NETHERLANDS

Sunside Paris FRANCE

Het Concertgebouw NETHERLANDS

**2015**: CCB Lisboa PORTUGAL

Casa da Música PORTUGAL

Lantaren Venster NETHERLANDS

**2014**: Blue Note Jazz Club New York USA

For further information, please contact Justin Time Records at 514.738.9533, or info@justin-time.com. To learn more about Justin Time, its 35 years of great recordings, and to browse its diverse catalogue of jazz, blues and gospel recordings, visit www.justin-time.com.