

maria mendes

Biography

From her native Portugal to her adopted home in the Netherlands, Grammy and Latin Grammy Award-nominated vocalist and composer Maria Mendes has traveled through a wide world of musical expression and wide-ranging influences. Hailed by *DownBeat* magazine as “a jazz singer of the highest order [whose] poise is as impressive as her power,” Mendes’ praises have been sung by such legendary figures as Quincy Jones and Hermeto Pascoal.

Mendes’ journey has taken her around the globe and across the borders between a variety of musical styles. But her latest release finds the multi-faceted jazz singer arriving at an unexpected destination for an artist with such far-reaching curiosity: home. On *Close To Me* (Justin Time), Mendes explores Fado, the melancholy music that originated in Portugal, for the first time. The project is far from a traditional take on the genre, however; Mendes finds her own distinctive connection to Fado, melding all the influences she’s garnered along the way and collaborating with the Grammy-winning arranger/pianist/producer John Beasley and the Grammy-winning Metropole Orkest.

Mendes makes every song feel deeply personal, approaching the American Songbook, Brazilian classics and the Fado repertoire of her homeland with her own unique jazz interpretation. She brings a vibrant passion to every performance, whether in a hushed, intimate setting or backed by the power and beauty of symphonic orchestras or jazz big bands. Her talents span a wide spectrum of expression throughout her three solo albums: *Along the Road* (2012), *Innocentia* (2015), and *Close To Me* (2019). *Close to Me* is the winner of the EDISON Jazz Awards 2020 in the category Jazz Vocaal Nationaal. (The EDISON music awards are the Dutch equivalent to the Grammy awards).

Mendes has enraptured audiences around the world, from small clubs to the grandest of stages, including the world-renowned Concertgebouw in Amsterdam as well as the North Sea and Montreux Jazz Festivals. She had the honor of being the first Portuguese artist to headline New York City’s iconic Blue Note Jazz Club, as well as being the first female Portuguese artist to garner a Grammy nomination.

In addition to her close partnership with John Beasley and the Metropole Orkest on *Close To Me*, Mendes has enjoyed fruitful collaborations with the Brussels Jazz Orchestra and with the acclaimed jazz clarinetist Anat Cohen; Mendes’ song “Inverso,” featuring Cohen, was featured on the soundtrack of the International Emmy-winning Portuguese soap opera *Ouro Verde* in 2018.

Though it was clear early on that singing would be central to her life, Mendes took a circuitous path to become the richly diverse artist that she is today. At just three years old she was determined to become an opera singer and was fortunate to receive the support and encouragement of her family. She studied classical voice and piano for ten years before crossing paths with jazz. Her curiosity awakened, she dug deep into her father's record collection, emerging with crooners like Frank Sinatra and Nat "King" Cole and the big band music of Count Basie and Duke Ellington.

She then embarked on a journey of discovery that led her to her most important influences in jazz: in Carmen McRae, Betty Carter and Shirley Horn she found three singular approaches to timing and the purity of an individual voice; in great pianists like Bill Evans and Keith Jarrett she heard the subtlety and introspection of a distinctively personal approach to one's instrument; through inventive horn players like Chet Baker and Cannonball Adderley she imbibed the myriad approaches to interpreting a melody.

Mendes went on to study in New York, Brussels and Rotterdam, where she has been based for more than a decade. She gives back through her own work as an educator, presenting master classes at music conservatories around the world. She's also delved into the music of Brazil, particularly the post-bossa nova sounds of Música Popular Brasileira (MPB), the influence of which adds brilliant colors to her already unique approach to jazz. These influences and experiences help make up what *Exclusive* magazine has called "one of the most engaging, enchanting vocal approaches... that exists today."

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