

Portuguese-born vocalist Maria Mendes brings her spirited blend of symphonic jazz and Fado to the concert stage with John Beasley and the Metropole Orkest on new live album

Saudade, Colour of Love*, due out October 7 on Challenge Records, features new orchestral arrangements of songs from her Grammy-nominated album *Close To Me

Born in Portugal and based for the last decade and a half in the Netherlands, Grammy and Latin Grammy Award-nominated vocalist and composer **Maria Mendes** is no stranger to living between two different worlds. With her critically acclaimed 2019 album *Close To Me*, Mendes, whose praises have been sung by such legendary composers as Quincy Jones and Hermeto Pascoal, spotlighted her ability to bring diverse influences together in stunning fashion with her vibrant fusion of symphonic jazz and Portuguese Fado, the folk music of her homeland.

Far from having exhausted the possibilities of that project, Mendes brings her singular vision to the concert stage in collaboration with master keyboardist/arranger **John Beasley** and the beloved **Metropole Orkest** on her breathtaking new live album, ***Saudade, Colour of Love***. Due out **October 7, 2022** via **Challenge Records**, the album further expands the emotional intensity of its predecessor's magical sound with the backing of a full orchestra. The lush, velvety symphonic sound creates sparks when it meets the exhilarating interplay of Mendes' brilliant quartet and the singer's fervent vocals, resulting in an unforgettable evening of music.

The Dutch Metropole Orkest, the world's leading pop and jazz orchestra, appeared on four tracks on *Close To Me*, but that was enough to convince Mendes that the collaboration could bear even greater fruit. "Working with the Metropole Orkest was so precious that it nurtured a seed in me that needed a lot more water," Mendes says. "Bringing together jazz and Fado has been the most important and artistically fulfilling work that I have done, really feeding my soul. It's been a new awakening to connect with this beautiful legacy that came from my ancestors."

Not that her Portuguese roots made Mendes' exploration of Fado inevitable. She had long resisted the music, its mournful, downbeat tone seeming to be incompatible with her impassioned approach to song, based in her operatic training, and in the spirited jazz improvisation that she learned from such important influences as Carmen McRae, Betty Carter and Shirley Horn. It took leaving home and putting down new roots in as vastly different a locale as the Netherlands to grant Mendes the perspective to discover a wholly original approach to Fado.

While Mendes and Beasley's arrangement of the Fado "Asas Fechadas" earned nominations for both Grammy and Latin Grammy Awards, the pandemic inevitably slowed the album's momentum. At the same time, it allowed the luxury of time to plan a truly spectacular showcase for expanded orchestral renditions of these songs to be premiered at two May 2022 concerts at Amsterdam's Muziekgebouw aan't IJ and at Parkstad Limburg Theaters in Heerlen. Mendes worked closely with John

Beasley in arranging the music for the symphonic setting, while Beasley crafted majestic orchestrations for the Metropole Orkest.

“I could not have done this without such a fantastic partner,” Mendes says. “John is such an eclectic and eager musician.”

One of the highlights on both albums is “Hermeto’s Fado for Maria,” a new piece written for Mendes by the iconic Brazilian composer Hermeto Pascoal. The song was gifted to her in the form of a handwritten score on the back of a hotel room emergency exit instruction card. Pascoal gave Mendes free rein to do what she wished with the song, the only demand being, “Don’t you dare to not record it!”

Mendes and Beasley also prepared three new songs for the new album. Mendes describes “Com Que Voz” as “one of my ultimate Fados, I find it extraordinary. the poetry is divine and existentialist, and I’m really proud of what John and I did to make detours from the original melody and harmony.” The performance that opens *Saudade, Colour Of Love* lives up to that enthusiasm, opening with lush strings behind Mendes’ emotional vocal, then building to a beautiful clarinet solo by the Metropole’s Christof May, accompanied by Cédric Hanriot’s strong piano work.

“Quando Eu Era Pequena” is an ancient, popular folkloric song for dancing, typically accompanied by female vocals. The dance is abstracted into Mário Costa’s opening drum solo, which establishes an unexpected 7/4 rhythm for the piece. “The song is very well known in Portugal, so I really wanted to give it a very faraway twist,” Mendes explains. The concert closes with “Meu Pobre Capitão,” a new composition by Mendes and Beasley written in the style of their Fado reinterpretations and here featuring a joyful audience singalong.

Through these and the half dozen songs from *Close To Me*, Mendes gives a truly moving and heartfelt performance, fueled by not only the passionate arrangements but by the two years of silence that preceded it. “I definitely experienced some spiritual growth feeling all the love from the musicians and the audience,” she says. “I felt like a phoenix rising from the ashes.”

Maria Mendes

From her native Portugal to her adopted home in the Netherlands, Grammy and Latin Grammy-nominated vocalist and composer Maria Mendes has traveled a world of musical expression. Hailed by *DownBeat* magazine as “a jazz singer of the highest order,” Mendes’ praises have been sung by such legends as Quincy Jones and Hermeto Pascoal. The vocalist has released four striking solo albums, most recently blending symphonic jazz and Portuguese Fado on the acclaimed *Close To Me* and the stunning live album *Saudade, Colour of Love*. She thrilled audiences around the world, including performances at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam and the Blue Note Jazz Club in New York. She fills her performances with a vibrant passion, be it in an intimate setting or carried by the powerful wave of a symphony orchestra or a jazz big band. Her wealth of influences and experiences help make up what *Exclusive* magazine called “one of the most engaging, enchanting vocal approaches... that exists today.”

Metropole Orkest

When you think of an orchestra, you think classical music. That's not the Metropole Orkest. Playing jazz, pop, world music and film scores, the Metropole Orkest has shared the stage with legends such as Ella Fitzgerald, Dizzy Gillespie, Pat Metheny, Brian Eno, Herbie Hancock, The Basement Jaxx and Bono. The MO invests just as much in playing with the next generation of stars like Kovacs, Robert Glasper, Snarky Puppy, Cory Wong, Gregory Porter, Jacob Collier and Ledisi. Over the years, Metropole Orkest has received no less than 21 Grammy nominations and worked on 4 Grammy-winning productions. The orchestra has produced more than 150 albums and thousands of radio and television broadcasts, requiring over 600 arrangements per year in every imaginable style.

John Beasley

Grammy winning and Emmy nominated keyboardist, composer, and arranger John Beasley began his career working with such icons as Miles Davis and Freddie Hubbard and has gone on to perform with a wide range of artists, including Dianne Reeves, Ivan Lins, John Patitucci, Chaka Khan, Christian McBride, Carly Simon, to name a few. Beasley served as Music Director for international tours with Steely Dan, AR Rahman and Queen Latifah and co-MD for Chucho Valdes. He is also the Music Director for the International Jazz Day global gala concerts hosted by the Herbie Hancock Jazz Institute. He has released three albums on Mack Avenue featuring his acclaimed, Thelonious Monk-inspired big band the MONK'estra.