

Hermeto Pascoal Revisited

Hermeto Pascoal is a genius. After working together, Miles Davis called him “one of the most important musicians on the planet.” As a child in northeastern Brazil with very poor eyesight, needing to stay out of the sun due to his albino complexion, he spent a lot of time alone, listening. The sounds of his grandfather's blacksmith shop, of his family's farm animals, of leaves in the wind and water in a creek, just as much as the accordion his father taught him, became music. I chose these tracks with the hope of showing how broad his musical world is. (I would also be remiss if I didn't thank Jovino Santos Neto, Hermeto's keyboardist and probably the foremost authority on his music, for his generosity and help over the years.) **ERIK CHARLSTON**



Hermeto Pascoal & Grupo

“De Sábado Prá Dominginhos”

Só Não Toca Quem Não Quer (Som da Gente, 1987)

Dominginhos was a great accordion player from the northeast of Brazil. This song is a *baião*—soul music for Hermeto—and it shows how fluent Hermeto's band was with this groove from the northeast. This tune has an unending flow to my ear; it just keeps on building and grooving and goes on forever. He clearly respects the rhythms of his country but makes them his own.

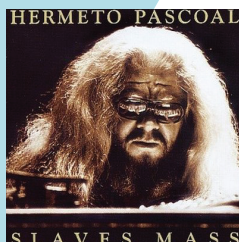
Hermeto Pascoal

“Chorinho pra Ele

(Little Cry for Him) ▶

Slaves Mass (Warner Bros., 1977)

Tradition and near-insanity are close brothers in Hermeto's music. This begins as a typical *choro*—and ends far from it. Not to be lost, though, is what a beautiful melody he's written. I love this tune.



Hermeto Pascoal e Grupo

“O Farol Que Nos Guia”

Festa dos Deuses (Philips, 1992)

The title of this song is really interesting: It translates to “The Lighthouse that Guides Us.” There's always an element of creativity so intense in his music that I might call it crazy. It's here, in this song, but sublimated in an absolutely gorgeous ballad featuring the beyond-wonderful Luciana Souza. The last half has a steady, determined momentum that's kind of like a great Spielberg climax—you know where it's going, but it's consistent, and beautiful, and ... bang.

Hermeto Pascoal

“Remelexo/Bem Vinda”

Ao Vivo Montreux Jazz (Atlantic, 1979)

If you ever wonder where all this creativity comes from, “Remelexo” is very illuminating. It's a peek inside Hermeto's mind, a mind-blowing stream of consciousness. He just goes off, verbally—you just don't hear something like that. But it's all music. I also love the contrast in the transition to the beautiful and brief “Bem Vinda.” It's a calm coda that tempers the volcano of his imagination.

Hermeto Pascoal e Grupo

“Pensamento Positivo”

Festa dos Deuses (Philips, 1992)

This is so cool. It's an example of how Hermeto hears everything as music: It's actually a speech given by then-Brazilian president Fernando Collor de Mello. It's all about the importance of positive thinking (which was a good idea at the time, though shortly thereafter his government collapsed over a corruption scandal). Regardless, Hermeto hears it musically, and meticulously orchestrates each word.

Hermeto Pascoal & Grupo

“Quiabo”

Só Não Toca Quem Não Quer (Som da Gente, 1987)

This is a *maracatu*, albeit one deeply embedded in Hermeto's language. Again, he's taking on a traditional Brazilian rhythm in a very uncompromising way. It's gnarly, it's dissonant, yet it's always grooving. “Quiabo” means “okra,” the vegetable—but it can also mean something slippery and hard to catch. The music certainly has a chase-like quality.

Hermeto Pascoal

“Miscelânea Vanguardiosa”

Eu e Eles (Rádio Mec, 1999)

The album title translates to “me and them”—referring to all the instruments he plays. Hermeto plays everything on this record, about 60 instruments. This particular piece is a mix of miscellaneous sounds that progress wonderfully when he plays them. Talk about an intimate window into his creative process: He's alone in the studio with his instruments and his imagination.

[as told to Michael J. West]

Erik Charlston, a percussionist and jazz vibraphonist, has performed or recorded with Wynton Marsalis, Steve Coleman, James Carter, Orlando Puntilla Rios, Sam Rivers, Dave Brubeck, and Tony Bennett, among others. The latest album by his JazzBrasil sextet, *Hermeto: Voice and Wind* (Sunnyside), pays tribute to the music of Hermeto Pascoal.

→ For more of Charlston's picks, visit JazzTimes.com