

Mayra Andrade

«Stória, Stória...»

RCA Victor / Sony Music

“This album bears the mark of many journeys.” To kick off the conversation, Mayra Andrade shares the basic theme of «Stória, stória...»

In 2006, this new voice emerged from the Cape Verdean archipelago in the Atlantic Ocean with her debut album “Navega,” a collection of songs that are as grounded in the traditional music from her homeland as they are nourished by different musical styles and colours. Today, after three years and countless performances, Mayra Andrade has clearly let go of her moorings and gone where the trade winds have always led her. Her childhood was immersed in the greatest voices from Cape Verde, but her music draws on all possible sources *“from radical free jazz to Brazilian music.”*

Mayra Andrade was born in Cuba in 1985, spent her earliest years in Cape Verde and since the ‘90s she has lived in several places, including Senegal, Angola and Germany. In 2001, while still a teenager, she won the gold medal at the French-speaking “Jeux de la francophonie” in Ottawa, Canada. *“I’ve spoken French since I was six years old. It’s like a third language to me.”* She finally touched down in Paris, drawn to the capital city’s cosmopolitan blend of many different cultures. It proved to be the ideal location to find her path, both personally and musically.

“More than a singer from Cape Verde, I’m a singer, period. Music has always been a part of me. If I feel like mixing Cape Verde songs with other sounds and influences, I believe I’m allowed to do that.” She is an entirely self-taught musician who writes on the guitar, free of the judgment and prejudice that can come with academic formulas and “logical” harmonies. Like singer-guitarist Tcheka, Mayra Andrade searches for her own music, fully immersed in the stylistic diversity of the Cape Verde islands. The two artists, along with a few others, have been referred to as the “Pantera generation,” named after a young composer who died in 2001; his songs had a gentle but profound effect on Cape Verdean music. Andrade covered four of his songs on “Navega.”

She started working on this album in the autumn of 2008, following a long series of performances. Mayra Andrade is a headstrong woman who wants to be free to go wherever she wishes. *“Singing is practically sacred to me!”* she claims, which probably explains why, as a young artist, she took the time to perfect her musical performances onstage, where her heart and soul shine. That’s where audiences discovered her and “specialists” eventually caught wind of her fantastic new talent. It’s also where she plans to bring her second album to life.

“Navega” established an artistic personality. «Stória, stória...» refines its message. To accomplish this task, she defined the basic ideas in Paris with Cape Verdean multi-instrumentalist Kim Álvés, Cameroonian bassist Etienne M’Bappé and Brazilian percussionist Ze Luis Nascimento, three faithful companions who know her well enough to anticipate her intentions and instincts; like her, they embrace Cape Verdean music in all its stylistic diversity. *“They know all the idiosyncrasies of the music, which makes it easier to transcend them. I need the strength of their suggestions.”* Mayra Andrade then went on to broaden and deepen the project, extending invitations to artists from all musical backgrounds. Each one enriches her panorama and colors her soundtrack. In Paris, she called on the crystal-clear kora sound of Guinean Djeli Moussa Diawara, Nicolas Genest’s dreamy trumpet, Angolan Zezé N’Gambi’s agile rhythm and Brazilian Marcos Suzano’s masterful percussion. They are only a few in the long list of featured guests. Others joined them in Brazil: percussionists in Salvador de Bahia, brilliant pianist André Mehmani in São Paulo, and other percussionists at the legendary samba studio in Copacabana, “Compania dos tecnicos.” In Cuba, pianist Roberto Fonseca and tres player Pancho Amat came on board. *“The choice of musicians was totally natural. I invited them because I knew they would add something to my music.”*

Each of them served her music impeccably, as did Jacques Morelenbaum and Lincoln Olivetti, who arranged and directed the recording of the strings and wind instruments respectively. Both proceeded with subtle sensitivity, creating a nuanced harmonic palette that perfectly showcases her voice.

“I wanted rhythm and percussion to play an important role in this album. More direct, with a natural sound but still very classy. Our main concern was technique: we didn’t want it to drown or mask the emotion.” Following the project from beginning to end, Mayra Andrade joined forces with the perfect man for the job: producer Alê Siqueira, who has attracted considerable attention by putting his stamp on, or rather creating a certain sound for, recent Brazilian pop gems by Marisa Monte, Caetano Veloso, Tom Zé and Arnaldo Antunes. *“I immediately knew he was the one, and I wasn’t wrong. Alê is a master...he’s a chameleon who can adapt, a confidant who knew how to listen to my dreams and embellish them, and a partner who took things into his own hands. Never too much or too little.”* No more, no less. Siqueira commented, *“Mayra has a classic voice - it’s timeless and universal.”*

So, how would you classify her music? World music? A musical blend? Rhythm gone tropical? She responds with a laugh: *“A musical crossroads, an “illegitimate” style...people from Cape Verde are naturally mixed,”* she says. *“If you take a close look at Cape Verdean music, you’ll find a strong connection to Brazilian music.”* This project demonstrates that transatlantic bond to its fullest. *“But I don’t feel like this album is any more Brazilian than the first,”* adds Andrade, who first devoured Caetano Veloso, then spent her childhood listening to the divas Elis Regina and Maria Bethânia. No, this repertoire is firmly grounded in Cape Verde, starting with a marvelous *funana sambado* called “Juana” and ending with “Lembransa,” a *morna* that sounds deceptively like a Cuban *danzón*. Her description of the rich musical atmosphere in Cape Verde is emphatic: roughly ten islands and more than fifty different styles! *“Traditional music is very specific. I recognize it after the first bar. It moves me and gives me substance.”* Cape Verdean music is present from beginning to end, for example in her revival of the *bandeira*, a rhythm typical of the island of Fogo. African rhythms kick in; an expressionist waltz foils our preconceptions and plucks at our heartstrings. In this myriad of influences Brazil may be in the foreground, but Cuba holds a special place as well, as demonstrated by singer Kelvis Ochoa and tres player Pancho Amat’s participation in the project. *“I’m very proud that my album includes some sounds from the country that brought me into the world.”* Cuban music is something special for her; it’s *“a truckload of emotion,”* as she puts it. This bittersweet fragrance blends perfectly with the hint of melancholy in her voice. In “Turbulensa,” by young Cape Verdean songwriter Nitu Lima, Mayra Andrade compares the sea’s changing tides to the life experience. To punctuate the metaphor, she uses the *marcha*, a carnival rhythm found in Santiago de Cuba as well as Brazil.

Between the lines of «Stória, stória...» Mayra Andrade tells many stories – about day to day life, life in general, and love. *“Some of the songs have an introspective feel to them.”* Set back to back, they weave a colorful backdrop of images. “Juana” is a social/political commentary written in the early ‘90’s by the Cape Verdean Kaka Barboza, in which the singer mentions the plight of Cape Verdean women, the fall of the Berlin wall and ordinary people’s uncertain futures all in one breath. “Konsiensa,” a more introspective piece set to a *batuku* rhythm, shows her as she is, begging her conscience not to let her stand still in life, and the album’s title song, accompanied by a Brazilian children’s chorus, sings the praises of a multicultural society in which all colors unite. “Seu,” an ode to the music within, is a gorgeous melody that has been in her head for three years. *“One day I picked up the guitar and wrote it in three hours.”* She recalls the wise words of mentor Paulinho Vieira, who once told her, *“When a song is meant for you, it comes to you and will not go away.”* “Mon Carrousel” presented the twofold challenge of co-writing with Fabien Pisani in French and matching the rhythm of a Cape Verdean *mazurka* co-composed with Portuguese accordionist Celina da Piedade. The result is a peculiar merry-go-round *“which mirrors the dual motion of life: it’s circular but also has ups and downs.”* The image is stunning, and it perfectly represents the rest of this album.