



## STAGE

Bruno Santos (baritone saxophone), Eugénia Lameiro (piano)  
Bandcamp

It is with slight trepidation that I approached Bruno Santos' latest album, *Stage*; it's not often that you find an entire album of music for baritone saxophone, and according to the booklet notes this is the

first such album recorded by a Portuguese saxophonist.

From the outset however, the listener is put at ease by Santos' rich and warm tone on the instrument, balanced perfectly against the piano of Eugénia Lameiro. The disc opens with Steven Banks' (another fantastic saxophonist) work *As I Am*. Banks writes "The piece loosely follows my journey as an artist from times of genuine, deep, beautiful contentment, to times of anguish, frustration, and serious thoughts of giving up. I choose to end the work with a relentless ascent of hope that the spark within me will, in fact, carry me through a life of positivity and love." Santos and Lameiro effectively capture this series of emotions with a range of tone colours on display.

*Veneno* by Diogo Santos is the first of five world premiere recordings on the disc and is a fantastic addition to the baritone saxophone repertoire, making full use of the instrument's range and allowing the baritone to sing. Santos deals seamlessly with the technical challenges and there is no hint of the laboured sound sometimes expected from such a large instrument.

*Ostinati* by José Martins changes the mood, with a somewhat mournful and searching opening gradually building in intensity. The piece moves into a lilting groove, though it never fully settles, keeping the listener on their toes. At moments it feels as though there are nods to Philip Glass, however the piece has a lot more development that its name might suggest, travelling through many different sections but always returning to its roots.

Next we come to *Crossroads from My Window* by Camila Salomé, which starts with a rather cheeky opening from the piano before the baritone saxophone makes its entry. This is probably one of the more contemporary-sounding works on the disc, but perhaps one of my favourites for its quirky, lopsided grooves, perfectly synchronised unison stabs and clever use of slap-tongue.

On *Pell Mell* by Bobby Ge, Santos is joined by flautist Mafalda Carvalho as we have somewhat of a change of sound-world, leaving the piano behind in exchange for a rich accompanying track featuring percussion and synthesizers. The flute playing is excellent, executing the required extended techniques with aplomb. Flute and baritone saxophone isn't a combination often heard, but perhaps it is fertile ground for exploration; the two instruments are able at moments to carve out their own paths whilst at others they work together, and Ge has made inventive use of extended techniques on both instruments.

João Milheiro's *Ballade Prá Maria* returns us to baritone saxophone and piano and is a rather lovely interlude between the more intense works on the disc. The opening notes of the theme are taken from *Valse Vanité* by Rudy Wiedoeft, but in a rather different style, beginning a beautiful melody that demonstrates the softer side of the baritone. Santos and Lameiro display some sensitive playing, with Santos showing off his mellifluous tone. This piece also highlights the recording quality of the disc, particularly the clarity and richness of the piano sound that has been captured.

I am big fan of Jean Matitia (the pseudonym used by Christian Lauba for his lighter works), and *Tango Suave* is the only piece on the album that may already be familiar to some readers. Here Santos is joined by fellow baritone saxophonist Henk Van Twillert. The pair embrace the jovial nature of the work and there is some impressive unison and octave playing. I'm not sure how much it adds having two baritones rather than one, however the playing is well matched, and it is a charming rendition of this fun piece.

The disc ends with *Otter* by Diogo Cordeiro, inspired by the way otters move through water. The piano provides a constant motion at the outset with the baritone swimming on top, but later in the piece the solo baritone section finds a real groove and we can picture a funky otter entertaining the crowds! This is a great fun piece to end the disc, and again the playing from both performers is exemplary.

Overall, the disc is a great demonstration of the capabilities of the baritone saxophone as a solo instrument and offers some important additions to the baritone saxophone repertoire.

Alastair Penman

