

SURFBOARD – Liner Notes

Surfboard is saxophonist Mike Tracy's sixth recording as a leader and it is a particularly special project. "I have been to Brazil around ten times and love the spirit of the music, with its different rhythms and expressive melodies," says Mike. "Surfboard is a collection of infrequently played (at least in the United States) Brazilian standards and originals with an all Brazilian rhythm section. We give our impressions of a variety of styles that one rarely encounters in the U.S."

Mike Tracy was born and raised in Louisville, starting on the saxophone when he was eight. He studied classical saxophone at the University of Louisville while also taking jazz lessons from Jamey Aebersold. Since then he has not only become a notable musician but an influential educator who is the Director of the Jamey Aebersold Jazz Studies Program at the University of Louisville School of Music, has taught in dozens of countries, established a jazz program at the Music Academy in Estonia, a longtime faculty member of the Jamey Aebersold Summer Jazz Workshops, and Fulbright Senior Specialist. "I love to see students become creative, finding parts of themselves that they didn't know were there." In addition, during the past year Mike has performed solos with a symphony orchestra in Ecuador, visited Argentina, Brazil and Russia, while continued teaching fulltime at the University.

Surfboard came about due to the saxophonist's friendship with pianist Renato Vasconcellos who he has known for over 12 years. To complete the quartet, Renato recommended bassist Leonardo Cioglia and drummer Vanderlei Pereira, both of whom are from Brazil and currently based in New York. Mike, who had never met either of the musicians, trusted Renato's judgment and, after a day and a half of rehearsal, they recorded all of Surfboard in less than two days.

The program begins with Hermeto Pascoal's fast samba "Vivo o Rio de Janeiro." Tracy's fluent soprano and Renato's inventive piano solo make this complex piece sound effortless. The two soloists put together the beginning and end parts which hint in spots at John Coltrane's "Giant Steps." "I saw Hermeto Pascoal play this song once in Brazil and I was overwhelmed by his music, it is so different. Not many people outside of Brazil play it."

"Recado Bossa Nova" was brought to Mike's attention from a student who had heard Hank Mobley's version. The quartet slowed the familiar piece down a bit, turning it into a seductive bossa nova warmly stated by Mike on tenor.

“Felizberto” is a charming original by Renato Vasconcellos that pays tribute to a cartoon character. It mixes together the Brazilian dance rhythm “xote” and a swing feel. Antonio Carlos Jobim’s “Surfboard,” which uses the chord structure of “How High The Moon” along with a Brazilian triplet figure, is a delight with Vanderlai’s subtle but colorful drums and percussion a major asset. Pascoal’s “Montreux” is a beautiful ballad that was originally written just minutes before its premiere at the 1979 Montreux Jazz Festival. It serves as a showcase for Mike’s very attractive tone and Renato’s sensitive piano.

Jobim’s “Mojave” is a rarity, a Brazilian jazz waltz. Bassist Leonardo Cioglia starts off with one of his best solos of the date, Mike plays passionately on tenor, and then the rhythm section gives the piece the feeling of being played in 4/4 even though it is still being performed in 3/4 time. Moacir Santos’ “April Child” is a spirited up-tempo piece that mixes the regular samba rhythm with a dance called the partido-alto. The result is a very danceable Brazilian romp that has infectious solos by Mike and Renato plus a heated tradeoff with Vanderlei.

Alfredo Moura, a graduate student at the University of Louisville and an in-demand pop producer in South America, wrote “Distante” for Mike. The melancholy ballad, about missing being at home, is very lyrical and inspires heartfelt playing by the quartet. Another former student, Anderson Pessoa, contributed “Mr. T cai no Forro” and guests on tenor, blending in well with Mike’s soprano. His original is a challenging piece that has a party atmosphere but also a tricky groove during which each two-bar phrase is displaced by a sixteenth of a beat. Surfboard concludes with the “Love Theme from Cinema Paradiso,” a haunting ballad by Ennio Morricone that is taken as a tenor-piano duet by Mike and Renato.

For the future, Mike Tracy says, “I love to play with musicians from other countries including many who may not be famous but are very talented. It is my goal to expose the players and new material to American audiences.” Surfboard is filled with memorable moments, fresh material, and inspired playing by Mike Tracy and his quartet.

Scott Yanow, author of ten books including *The Jazz Singers*, *Trumpet Kings*, *Jazz On Film* and *Jazz On Record 1917-76*