

LEO Weekly

by **Martin Z. Kasdan Jr.**

Brazilian wax trax

Saxophonist Mike Tracy is a world traveler and a highly respected jazz educator who serves as the director of the Jamey Aebersold Jazz Studies Program at the University of Louisville's School of Music. *Surfboard*, a tribute to the music of Brazil, is his sixth album and his first on the well-regarded Summit label. Speaking the day after returning from his most recent trip to Brazil, any jet lag was far outweighed by his enthusiasm for his new project.

LEO: What is it about Brazil that grabs you about its music?

Mike Tracy: It's the overall spirit and love of music that they, as a country, have. It's not just a few people — they all really respect the history and tradition that has grown up with their music, and the players are exceptional, and there is a spirit of life and fun playing. It adds another level of intensity and excitement for me as a player and as a person.

LEO: You have known and performed with pianist Renato Vasconcellos for a long time, but this was the first time you played with the other musicians. How did that work?

MT: Both were recommended by Renato, and I trusted him completely. Drummer Vander-lei Pereira's sensitivity and understanding of what we wanted to do was instantaneous. He made it very easy to play. Leonardo Cioglia, the bassist, is a very skilled master accompanist. It came down to Renato and me to carry the bulk of the soloing, and their role was to make us sound good, and they did.

LEO: The compositions were all by others. How did you decide what to play?

MT: First off, I'm not a composer; my primary skill is playing my instrument. The main idea for the music was for me to learn as much as I could as an improviser and instrumentalist on how to play the style of music. The object was to play music by Brazil's major composers who are not frequently played in the United States. It was really me engulfing myself in learning how to play their music.

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