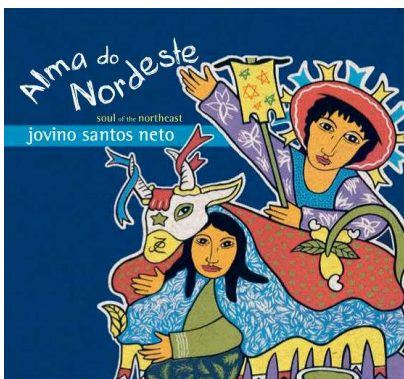


allmusic

Alma do Nordeste

Jovino Santos Neto
(Adventure Music)
2008

Review by Jonathan Widran



When it comes to world music, many American tend to think the music of a particular country all has a similar vibe, forgetting that different regions of the U.S. gave rise to very distinct genres. Brazilian born, Seattle based composer and keyboardist Jovino Santos Neto offers a tremendous education on the rousing and bright, densely percussive, accordion-laced and highly danceable music found in the Northeast part of his native land. His colorful liner notes qualify his interest as one rooted in the fact that he's a Rio-born grandson of "Nordestinos" and informs us that a generous grant allowed him and his wife Luzia to take an 800 mile journey to the heart of the region.

Composing new songs and remaking older ones he had written that fit perfectly into the project's theme, the versatile musician (who, in addition to piano, plays melodica, fifes and flute) creates a fascinating musical interpretation of the beautiful landscapes (the lyrical and graceful "Fulo Sertaneja"); the mythological importance of the ox (the strutting, sax driven "Donkey Xote"); the creativity, humor, accent and hospitality of the people (the celebratory, accordion-jumping "Festa Na Macuca"); and the co-existence of the medieval themes within the visionary and fantastic realism of the cordel literature sold at street markets. There are also a few cool odes to the way the grape made the couple feel: the lilting, lighthearted "Amoreira" (which translates to Raspberry Wine) and the punchy, sax driven jazz jam "Forro Vino."

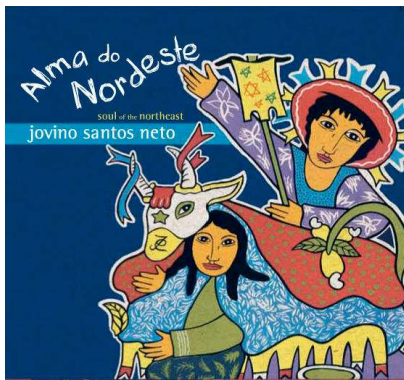
The music was recorded in Rio with a handful of great Brazilian musicians, and caps all of the celebrating Santos Neto no doubt did after receiving his Latin Grammy nominations in 2004 and 2006. This is a fascinating exploration that's both musically joyous and richly illuminating.



Alma do Nordeste

Jovino Santos Neto
(Adventure Music)
2008

By Martin Gladu



Luxurious, green rolling hills probably spring to mind when thinking of Brazil's northeastern region. As rich in culture and traditions as it is in chlorophyll, the areas of Pernambuco, Paraíba, Sergipe, and particularly the small coastal state of Alagoas have all produced many renowned artists. One of those—multi-instrumentalist/composer Hermeto Pascoal, a fascinatingly unique, iconoclast musician—was pianist Jovino Santos Neto's employer from 1977 to 1992.

In *Alma Do Nordeste*, Santos Neto offers a diversified program, one that includes a wide palette of hues consisting of folk-based pieces and musically-transposed

personal encounters with the region's "soul" (hence the "Alma" of the album's title), spirit and diverse cultural elements. Like his mentor, the Carioca (or Rio-based) pianist succeeds in transmitting the region's multifarious beauty and appeal.

Aided by a slew of capable Brazilian musicians, Santos Neto frames his pieces in a contemporary-sounding, jazz-infused setting with soft fusion overtones that sometimes verge on the festive. Out of the happy bunch, the sweet slurs of harmonicist Gabriel Grossi command attention on the two more pop-ish tracks, "Rede, Sossego e Chamego" and "Biboca," as do the fretless glissandi of Dudu Lima, whose playing recalls Jaco Pastorius, the late bassist and friend of Pat Metheny. While their compositional styles and artistic aspirations are quite different, many will find in this music a comfortable extension of the Metheny Group's amazingly popular recordings of the 80's and early 90's.

One also learns that Santos Neto was greatly influenced by percussionist Airto Moreira. So it comes as no surprise to find a fierce musical leader and master technician in drummer Marcio Bahia—especially his playing on "Amoreira," with its crazy coda, but also on "Forro Vino," a driving track with tight, syncopated accents.

Exemplifying the old saying that all music is folk music, the opener "Festa na Macuca" recalls the accordion-squeezed, gumbo-drenched Creole shindigs heard in southern Louisiana. Drawing on the homeland's African heritage and, consequently, more ritualistic/spiritual traditions, "Passareio" is a percussive vignette with a pair of flutes wailing above sampled natural sounds, superimposed rhythmic patterns and repetitive drum beating.

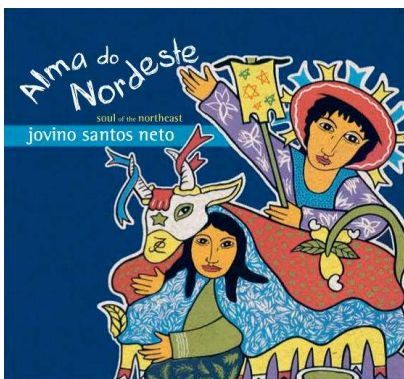
In sum, it may not be too far-fetched to state that, in the album's peculiar co-sponsorship by Brazil's Ministry of Culture and energy giant Petrobras, as well as by its own artistic factory, *Alma Do Nordeste* somewhat symbolizes Brazil's sociological dichotomy: enthusiastically looking

ahead into the future, yet inhabited by the weight of its history; looking for ways to honor the past, while at the same time, going beyond it.



Alma do Nordeste

Jovino Santos Neto
(Adventure Music)
2008



Brazilian-born, Seattle-based multi-instrumentalist Jovino Santos Neto is an artist I'm just getting familiar with, but his brand new CD *Alma do Nordeste* has sure gotten my curiosity. The title means "soul of the Northeast" in Portuguese, and as I alluded to at the top, the "northeast" being referred to here is the northeast region of Brazil. Neto returned to his native country and created this collection of music that celebrates and introduces to the rest of the world the jubilant music of that area.

What you will find from listening to *Alma do Nordeste* is that there is a lot of accordion in this music and the percussion is often more complex than the stereotypical Brazilian music but still very danceable. Every tune has its own distinct character, which only goes to show how rich and varied the music is out of just a portion of this South American country.

Neto adds his own contemporary touches in the right places to bring the genre into the twenty-first century, and wrote all the songs with the traditions of the nordeste in mind. He brings considerable expertise to bear on this project, having worked under such names as Hermeto Pascoal, Aírto Moreira, Flora Purim, and Sérgio Mendes. Neto supplied piano, melodica, fifes and flute to the sessions, and is joined by eleven other Brazilian musicians.

So, you see? Good Brazilian music didn't begin with Antonio Carlos Jobim. With talents like Jovino Santos Neto around, it certainly doesn't end with him, either.

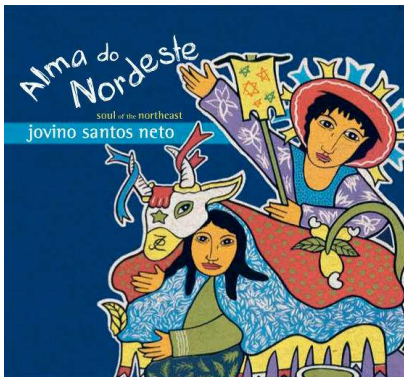


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Alma do Nordeste

Jovino Santos Neto
(Adventure Music)
2008

Reviewed by: Mark Strohschein



There is an old adage that suggests that one will inevitably return home again to discover his true identity, walking those same hallowed streets of his antecedents. Such is the case with Jovino Santos Neto's new release, *Alma do Nordeste* (Soul of the Northeast)—an album, for the most part, conceived and recorded in Northeastern Brazil with old and new friends. Drummer Marcio Bahia and harmonica player Gabriel Grossi, who both appeared on Neto's successful *Roda Carioca*, return on this latest effort. As Neto explains in his liner notes, an 800-mile, cross-country tour to the states of Alagoas, Pernambuco and Paraíba inspired him to capture the sounds of his grandparents' native land.

The 13 cuts criss-cross the Northeastern musical stylings of forró, baião and xote while maintaining jazz sensibilities. Forró, because of its generous use of accordion, sounds like a combination of zydeco and reggae. It's party music that is still heard on the lush beaches of Recife. In all three styles, the accent is on the two and the four, much like in a polka. The slowest of the three, xote is meant for slow dancing and is rooted in the German polka, the schottische. *Alma do Nordeste's* "Festa na Macuca" ("Party at the Macuca Farm"), an atypical baião in 7/4 rhythm, gets the party started. Neto had indulged in irregular rhythm on *Roda's* first tune, the aptly named "Estrela do Mar" ("Starfish"), played in 5/4. Despite its odd time, "Festa" is unabashedly jaunty, and Jacob do Bandolim, if he was still alive, would have reveled in the cut's tight, swift, melodic head.

Other energetic pieces include "Amoreira" ("Raspberry Vine"), Neto's nod to legendary percussionist Airtó Moreira, as well as "Alma do Nordeste" and "Forró Vino." All three showcase the musicians' organic musicality (it doesn't come through as strongly on *Roda*) and ability to jam full throttle. The title cut is given tribal coloring with the inclusion of Tiago da Serrinha's Brazilian bass drum, the zabumba, and his driving pandeiro (Brazilian tambourine), a mainstay in the choro form.

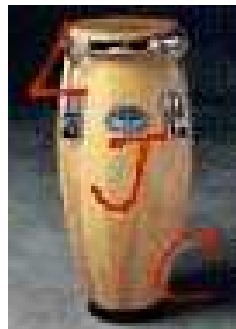
The most interesting xote is "Fulô Sertaneja" ("Flower from the Sertão"), which opens with Neto's introspective, rubato piano. Marcelo Martins then joins him, offering a dose of sparse and soulful soprano sax. Martins' playing is reminiscent of Bradford Marsalis' on Requiem's more somber tracks. Surprisingly, "Fulô" evolves into an admirable groove before it fades out.

If you want to listen to some classic forró, then throw on some Dominginhos. However, if you're looking for a CD that tries "not to recreate what had already been done so well by generations of

great musicians from the Northeast," then take a ride with Neto and visit the multifarious musical landscapes that Alma do Nordeste explores.

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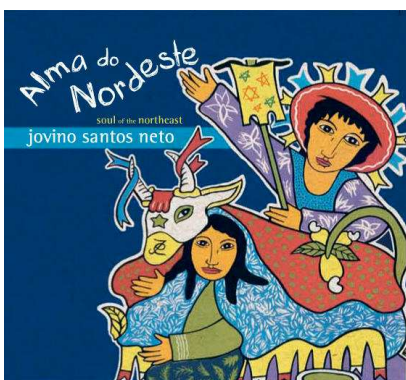
The Latin Jazz Corner



Alma do Nordeste

Jovino Santos Neto
(Adventure Music)
2008

Reviewed by Chip Boaz
www.chipboaz.com/blog/



A great composer takes his listeners past the simple execution of traditional form; instead they vividly describe the subjects of their pieces. Musical building blocks like tempo, texture, and dynamics help shape mood and guide the listener's feelings. Cultural elements reference specific times and places; certain ethnic instruments bring a culture or country to mind. Creative interpretation of these elements adds perspective to a piece and allows a listener to view the subject from the composer's eyes. Personal expression placed inside of these structures allows the listener to interpret the musician's opinions on the subject. Jovino Santos Neto brings all these pieces together into a striking set of compositions that describe the Northeastern region of Brazil on *Alma do Nordeste* (soul of the northeast).

Unique Compositional Approaches Build New Meaning

Neto introduces unique compositional techniques to add depth and direction to several songs. A rubato flute conversation between Neto and Carlos Malta opens "Alma do Nordeste" until driving percussion leads into an exotic melody. Neto and Malta expand their conversation into a collective improvisation that builds into a frenzied climax. A return to the main theme integrates several melodic developments as well as a journey into 6/8 and double time. Ambient sounds from the Northeastern Brazilian region of Pernambuco introduce "Passareio." An unusual 31 beat cycle gives the song a distinctly different flavor, while the use of Brazilian percussion instruments keeps the song grounded. The song avoids traditional melodic conventions, relying upon a free improvisation between Neto and Malta that instigates imagery of birds. A galloping rhythm full of interesting note choices takes listeners on a ride during "Vermeio Agreste Lampião." The texture increases in depth, reaching a hectic strength with a collective improvisation between Toninho Ferragutti's accordion, Eduardo Neves' flute, and Marcelo Martins' tenor sax. The group adds coloristic fills to a timeless section until the rhythm section returns with the song's powerful main pulse. A fusion influenced groove in 7/4 as well as a duet between soprano sax and melodica provide a strong foundation in Neto's tribute to drummer Airtó Moreira, "Amoreira." Neves patiently builds his soprano sax solo from short ideas into long, busy phrases that exploits the instrument's high register. Neto utilizes syncopated rhythms and jazz influenced runs to create an

inspiring melodic statement. The bold compositional shift outside the stylistic norms of Brazilian music helps the listener build diverse imagery and capture new meanings.

Capturing The Region's Culture and Spirit

Neto utilizes the Northeastern styles of forró and xote to capture the region's spirit and culture. Ferragutti displays the accordion's strong expressive abilities on the bluesy melody to "Saudade de Sua Gente." The inherent swing of the xote rhythm frees Neto to include traditional jazz phrasing, giving the song an earthy feel. Ferragutti reveals range and virtuosity through quick chromatic runs while fretless bassist Dudu Lima provides a busy improvisation. The up-tempo drive of Tiago da Serrinha's pandeiro pushes "Forró Vino" through a series of band breaks under Martins' tenor sax melody. Moving melodic sequences and strong rhythmic accents build Martins' solo into an assertive statement. After Neto plays a jazz tinged solo, drummer Marcio Bahia shapes an exciting and tastefully developed solo around band hits. Neto thoughtfully constructs a solo piano introduction to "Fulô Sertaneja," leading smoothly into a gentle duet with Martins. As the melody closes, Neto jumps into a xote rhythm leading the band into a swinging shuffle section. Martins colors the groove with blues licks that quickly evolve into a conversational improvisation with Neto. Bahia and Lima add spice to the swung groove on "Donkey Xote" with slightly askew fills and rhythmic interpretations. Lima takes an extended solo, exploring blues ideas, chordal colors, and rhythmic accents. Martins responds with a carefully constructed soprano sax solo, leading into Bahia's explosive improvisation between breaks. Neto's creative interpretation of xote and forró takes the repertoire in new directions and adds the authentic touch of musical genres from Northeastern Brazil.

Different Variations on the Baião

Neto interprets the Northeastern Baião rhythm in several different ways in order to express his vision. A short piano introduction brings "Borborema" directly into a rhythmic melody. Bahia and Lima open into a free texture, allowing Neto to creatively construct an interesting statement. Martins joins Neto's closing phrase before moving into his aggressive solo that invokes an enthusiastic response from the rhythm section. Neves, Martins, and Neto melodically exploit the different feel of the baião in 3/4 on the main theme to "São Pedro na Jangada." The group transitions into a percussion feature, highlighting the unique nature of the rhythmic structure. The horns return for quick breaks, allowing Bahia to fill around the 3/4 time. The rhythm section layers into the main pulse on "Biboca" before harmonica player Gabriel Grossi introduces the beautifully simple melody. Neto plays with thematic development and sequential movement to drive his solo assertively through the form. Grossi's rich tone returns with an insightful solo that progresses from spacious notes into quick runs. Ferragutti's polyrhythmic playing over an up beat 7/4 baião rhythm creates an energetic introduction on "Festa na Macuca." Martins' flute and a rhythm section breakdown lead the group into an exciting solo exchange between Martins and Ferragutti. Neto jumps into an inspired improvisation that engages Bahia in spontaneous accents, eventually leading back to the melody. The recurring presence of the baião rhythm forms an important foundation for the album, and Neto's creative manipulation of the style helps him invoke specific ideas from the music.

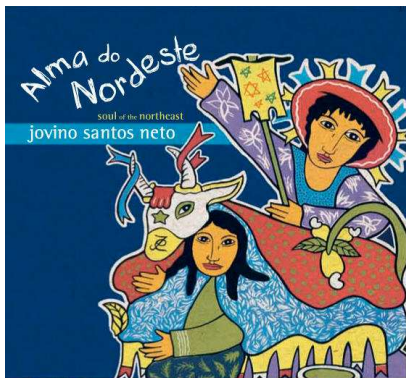
Vividly Bringing The Culture of Northeastern Brazil To Life

Neto creates bold sonic imagery of Northeastern Brazil on Alma do Nordeste (soul of the northeast), bringing together diverse compositional tools to paint a strong picture. His use of rhythms from the Northeastern region makes an authentic connection to the culture. Neto's willingness to experiment with the genres through time signature, texture, and instrumentation colors the music and further focuses his concept. The extensive presence of improvisation adds perspective to the work, allowing each player to comment upon diverse settings. The individual musicians invest significant energy into reflecting upon the Northeastern Brazilian culture. They both follow the structure of Neto's compositions and insert their personal voices into the work. Alma do Nordeste (soul of the northeast) benefits from Neto's thoughtful craftsmanship, stylistic and cultural knowledge, and expansive musicianship - Neto pulls all these pieces into his compositions, vividly bringing the culture and sounds of Northeastern Brazil to life.

Alma do Nordeste

Jovino Santos Neto
(Adventure Music)
2008

Contributed by: Patricia Herlevi



For his third release on Adventure Music, Brazilian jazz pianist and composer Jovino Santos Neto celebrates the music of Northeastern Brazil--and what a wealth of musical styles! "Alma do Nordeste (Soul of the Northeast)," features a variety of Brazilian genres including, Baião, xote, Forró, marcha and others. Lush Afro-Brazilian polyrhythms provide a backdrop for swirling flute, woodwinds, lush accordion and gorgeous instrumental harmonies.

From the cover art to the passionate musicianship of Jovino (piano, melodica, flute), Toninho Ferragutti (accordion), Gabriel Grossi (harmonica), Carlos Malta, Eduardo Neves and Marcelo Martins (woodwinds), Joseman Honaine (10 string guitar), Dudu Lima (basses), Marcio Bahia (drums), Tiago da Serrinha and Durval Pereira (percussion) and Pernambuco (voice)--whew!, this music feels like the sun bursting forth through layers of clouds. Especially on the title track, when the music breaks into a frenzy guided by Pernambuco's passionate vocals.

It is a real challenge to focus on any one of the thirteen tracks since they are all splendid well-researched compositions. As always, Jovino has brought a great deal of sensitivity and enchantment to his compositions and performance. The band he recorded with in Rio appears tight and the musicians play well off each other. The opening track, "Festa na Macuca" immediately captivates and Ferragutti's accordion grabs the spotlight.

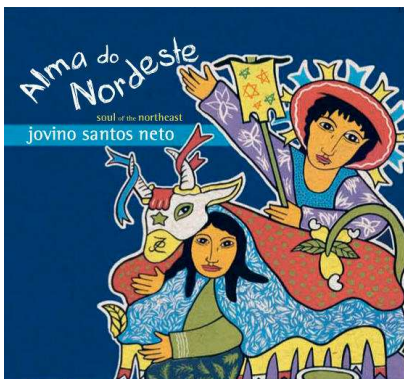
Alma do Nordeste certainly is one of those album that takes a few listens to review because of its rich musical textures and layers. The musicians solo throughout and I can imagine that a live performance by this band would both excite and wear out the audience who would be applauding no doubt at every twist and turn. This album combines excitement, beauty, passion with gorgeous melodies. Jovino's hard work has paid off yet again.



Alma do Nordeste

Jovino Santos Neto
(Adventure Music)
2008

Reviewed by Randy Morse, "The Best of Brazil" radio host

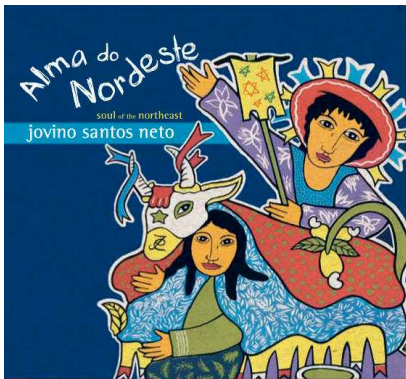


"This is a fabulous album – the most satisfying released so far this year of albums mixing jazz with Northeastern genres. Jovino strikes the ideal balance. The musical flavors of Northeastern Brazil are never overpowered by the jazz elements. The songs are not jazz with a hint of Northeastern music thrown in to spice things up, or simply jazz built on a foundation of rhythms like baião or forró. It's a perfect union of the two traditions. "Alma do Nordeste" is true both to the soul of Northeastern music and to the soul of jazz, and therein lies its greatness."

Alma do Nordeste

Jovino Santos Neto
(Adventure Music)
2008

From Doug Ramsey's RiffTides blog
<http://www.artsjournal.com/riffTides>



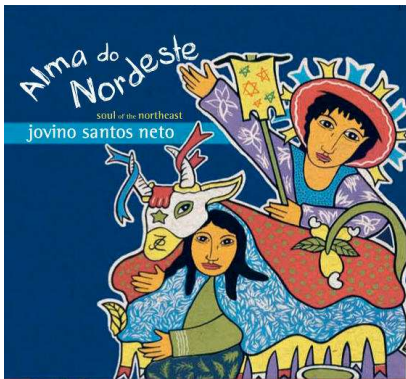
Jovino Santos Neto, *Alma do Nordeste* (Adventure Music). Based for some years in Seattle, the pianist, flutist and composer returns to his native Brazil and collaborates with eleven of his countrymen. The music is based in the baiões, forrós, xotes and other rich forms of Northeastern Brazil. It is intensely rhythmic, melodic and full of adventure. Indigenous percussion and stringed instruments meld beautifully with Santos Neto's jazz concepts. Once you've heard Toninho Ferragutti's playing in the tradition of the great Sivuca, you may think twice before you tell your next accordion joke.

brazil magazine

Alma do Nordeste

Jovino Santos Neto
(Adventure Music)
2008

Written by Bruce Gilman



In his latest foray as a leader for Adventure Music, the multi-talented Jovino Santos Neto has turned his attention entirely to Brazil's Northeast, to his grandparents' culture and its idiosyncratic sonority. For those who love the sound, the tonal and coloristic possibilities, the energetic rhythms, it may come as a surprise that rarely, if ever, has there been a recording where its magic has been treated more daringly, where composer, soloists, and ensemble connect with more unerring intuition.

Like spicy gossip shared among friends, *Alma do Nordeste* is a close and creative collaboration among performers who play with passionate conviction and splendid risk-taking. There is, among the hearty band of Brazilians who coalesce around and who are completely at ease in framing Santos Neto's thirteen originals, an interactive immediacy that bespeaks an inspired as well as shared vision.

Santos Neto has a characteristic style of writing, constructing radically shaped compositions with unexpected edges and angles. His is a spiky and unpredictable music that makes soloists think, instead of casually whizzing through the changes. Offering a broad spectrum of his ensemble writing, *Alma do Nordeste* includes pieces that demonstrate the composer's love for twisting odd-metered lines and recall the whimsical phrasing of his mentor, Hermeto Pascoal. The most interesting aspect of hearing new works by a musician irrevocably stirred by his 15 year stint with Hermeto's ensemble, Grupo, is in spotting those inimitable harmonic fingerprints and translucent colors that define his own musical personality, and *Alma do Nordeste* is full of telltale signs; its near-cinematic flow neatly encapsulates hallmarks of Santos Neto's style. Few if any recordings spark or scintillate with such daredevilry, or are of such unapologetic voltage. That daring Northeastern nature emerges with striking force on every track.

The opener is a characteristic example. From its first notes, the listener knows he is in for a memorable musical experience. Composed with traditional quadrilha phrasing, "Festa na Macuca" is a spirited baião in 7/4 dedicated to sanfona virtuoso Sivuca featuring Toninho Ferragutti's accordion, the doyen flute flights of Marcelo Martins, and Santos Neto, whose surging melodic variation on piano catches our attention, all journeying over a consciously asymmetric terrain laid by the percussionists, notably Marcio Bahia, a Grupo alum, who excites some sparkling mambo-like interplay between himself and the ensemble.

"Saudade de Sua Gente" (Your Folks Miss You), dedicated to Marinês, the "Queen of Xaxado," eschews a profusion of notes and chord changes, something uncharacteristic for Santos Neto.

Coaxing a variety of strongly personalized statements from their instruments, soloists Santos Neto, Ferragutti, and bass player Dudu Lima capture the air of resignation alluded to in the title. Durval Pereira's zabumba, the backbone of this xote, guarantees the right foundation; this is Northeastern music played with flair and imagination by musicians whose creative processes demand a clear and tangible base.

"Amoreira," a wordplay on percussionist Airto Moreira's name, disguises its 7/4 meter behind a seemingly simple soprano sax melody played by Eduardo Neves and doubled by Santos Neto on a digitally distorted melodica. Neves delivers a furiously unfolding solo, followed seamlessly by Santos Neto whose improvisation is invested with a rich strain of inspired ideas. Energetic, edgy, swirling, allusive, the tune benefits greatly from the conviction and emotional commitment of Marcio Bahia's rhythmic torrent.

Based on a syncopated 31-beat cycle, "Passareio" illustrates how fifes and percussion, full of jangling dissonance and strangely macabre overtones, contribute equally to the ingeniousness and evolution of the banda de pífanos. Augmented with prerecorded ambient sounds from a street market in Recife, this truly spontaneous-sounding, atmospheric evocation of a treetop "conference of the birds" is as transfixing as a candle-flame's hypnotic dance on the wick. The Orson Welles film *It's All True*, about four fishermen from Fortaleza on a 1600 mile ocean voyage, was the inspiration for "São Pedro na Jangada." Neto's attention to melody on this programmatic baião in 3/4 proceeds not only in a straight line, but also in quick to curve phrases. Anchored by percussionists Tiago da Serrinha and Durval Pereira, providing color as well as drive, the tune fashions an image of courageous Northeastern fishermen in flimsy rafts navigating rough seas.

Serene and with an unusual sense of underlying grace, the toada "Rede, Sossego e Chamego" spotlights Marcelo Martins (flute) and Gabriel Grossi (harmonica) riffing off each other to great effect. It is always a pleasure to hear Grossi, whose only operating criterion is quality, solo with such beautiful tone and consistent inner logic. Martins pursues the tune's options with headlong, convoluted lines, delivering an astonishing display of flute virtuosity, while Santos Neto reveals his lightness of touch and feeling for subdued tone colors.

Introduced by an impromptu piano and soprano sax dialogue, "Fulô Sertaneja" is the second of three xotes on the CD. Here Santos Neto, demonstrating he has plenty of time to execute ideas, and Marcelo Martins, initially caressing the tune's gentle curves with typical inventiveness before driving on remorselessly, are tellingly juxtaposed with Marcio Bahia's exquisite cymbal and stickwork whisking up a smoldering backdrop. The title track, "Alma do Nordeste," brings together three Grupo alumni (Santos Neto, Carlos Malta, and Pernambuco), who groove so hard it would be perverse for listeners not to tap their feet as this group gets deep into an infectiously buoyant baião. This is a groove tune, raw and emotional - a delight throughout - with percussionists Tiago da Serrinha and Durval Pereira showing themselves to be perfect foils for the flute soloists. Josemen Honaine's extending the sound palette with his 10-string guitar and Dudu Lima's ideas, strong and well-articulated, are much in sympathy with the tune's structure and stylistic objectives. Lima's empathic bass sound is also apparent on "Biboca," a tune on which Gabriel Grossi's razor-sharp cascades of repeated notes are stunning, ideally fitting the spirit of this jaunty baião. Santos Neto's tightly-structured solo deftly works into the pulsing texture, providing shifting peaks and valleys of intensity, underpinned by the sheer rhythmic strength of Tiago da Serrinha's triangle and the cymbal work and sudden felicitous side drum interventions from Marcio Bahia. Bahia's powerful style proves itself equally effective and at the heart of "Forró Vino," a tune on which Serrinha's pandeiro bristles. Marcelo Martins punches hard into this tune with his fiercely propulsive tenor, soloing beautifully, his lines dancing and adding spark to the scorching tempo.

Santos Neto embroiders the tenor solo with tiny percussive dissonances before contributing a full-frontal improvisation of his own that abounds with strange twists, clusters, and flurries of notes, an antecedent to a percussive explosion from Bahia--an adrenaline rush.

"Borborema," a baião inspired by the Borborema mountain range in Paraíba, features the sinuous soprano sax flights of Marcelo Martins as well as the innovative keyboard talent of Santos Neto, who ascends to the summit with spare and linear playing verging on the minimalist. Dexterous and imaginative, his conception is more original than most and crammed full of ideas, both as a soloist and as an accompanist. Dudu Lima's large, sensual bass tone and Bahia's off-center delivery capture the unpredictability and peculiarities of the setting. "Donkey Xote" wordplays on Don Quixote, the tragicomedy by Cervantes and brings out all of Quixote's endearing and aggravating qualities (Northeastern style). With numerous hints of exaggeration and a large sense of humor, Marcelo Martins on soprano sax sustains a willowy line around angular intervals punctuated by the coloristic grit emanating from Santos Neto, while Bahia disrupts and dislocates the beat with counter-rhythms abetted by sudden percussive flurries. Dudu Lima's slippery imagination is unmistakable here in the fluid density of a bass solo, which even quotes Ari Barroso's "Na Baixa do Sapateiro."

"Vermeio Agreste Lampião," another programmatic tune, quick cutting moods and colors à la cinematic montage, evokes images of Lampião and his band of outlaws riding horseback through the night to avoid capture. The collective improvisation over its relentless groove, a wonderfully hectic romp representing the spirit of Brazil's Northeast, is near-telepathic, an exploration that unfolds with freely alternating solo and ensemble segments, where tastefully rambunctious melodic and rhythmic motifs bounce like billiard balls.

Never one to travel in a straight line when there are curves to consider, Jovino Santos Neto brings to his composing and arranging an open-minded, eclectic approach which has borne fruit here in a rich, vigorous, and fresh-sounding CD, packed with ideas and bursting with vitality. In his effort to explore a dialogue between music of the 21st century and firmly-rooted Northeastern rhythms and modalities, Santos Neto has found the perfect balance. He and his musicians exude an easy familiarity with the two musics, the two cultures. They have an authoritative ease in execution that only comes through complete mastery. This is contemporary music that retains strong links with what has gone before; in many ways the CD, uniting old and new elements with absolute stylistic consistency, represents a logical extension of the progress made by the 1970s Música Armorial movement. What comes across most on this disc is a sense of committed and thoroughly enjoyable music making.

However much Hermeto may have influenced his work, Alma do Nordeste catches Santos Neto at his best and most characteristic, and provides a revealing glimpse of him moving off in his own melodic and harmonic direction. And however complex the ground-plan, the ensemble is so well attuned to it and to each other that the music remains gloriously alive as it dances through a brilliant flow of colors, dramas, and flashing outbursts of fiery intensity.

The music of Jovino Santos Neto comes from no forced or academic effort. His music is too spontaneous, too inevitably human. No composer's music stands to benefit more from extensive exposure, not so much because of its quality (which is beyond question), but because of an almost tangible connection with its traditions, which are recast anew and carried forward. This is real music with the emphasis on communication and with players who can stretch odd-metered time to the point of extinction.