

*„what she does let  
us see is pure  
beauty.“  
(PopMatters.com)*



*„the sparks fly  
around her“ (BBC)*

**Céu**

Brazil

## Céu at The Highline Ballroom, New York City

By Ernest Barteldes – July 26, 2009



On her first US tour in support of her recently released CD *Vagarosa* (Six Degrees, 2009), the São Paulo-based singersongwriter took the stage backed by a solid quartet formed by DJ Marco (sampler, turntables), Zé Nicro (bass), Samuel Fraga (drums) and Guilherme Ribeiro (guitar, keys).

The group kicked off with a dreamy psychedelic-funk number that immediately got fans moving, and followed

that with another new tune that had a Northeastern Brazilian vibe. Her band had great chemistry together. DJ Marco, Nicro and Fraga formed a tight unit, which allowed Ribeiro to add more texture to the music without leaving any spaces open in the overall sound. Céu did revisit a handful of tunes from her first disc, such as "Vinheta Quebrante" and "Malemolencia," but most of the set was concentrated on the new disc.

She also played a couple of covers, the first of which was "Vista de Jaca," a tune originally recorded by Rio de Janeiro icon Martinho da Vila. Her take on that song was considerably different than the original. While da Vila's version is a straight ahead samba, Céu preferred to take it in a contemporary Brazil-meets-Sly Stone direction. The sole English-language number of the evening was a playful reggae take on the 1961 Ray Charles-Betty Carter collaboration "It Takes Two to Tango."

The room was completely full, an impressive showing considering that despite her Grammy nominations, Céu has not yet become a household name, neither here nor in Brazil. The audience was multi-cultural, and by the end of the set the people standing around the venue's two bars were freely dancing to her infectious mix of funk, reggae and samba.

Two of the best moments of the New York show (which closed her mini-US tour) were the ballad "10 Contados," which featured Ribeiro playing a soft accordion and deftly complementing DJ Marco's soft vocal effects. Also very well received was "Ave Cruz," a song from her first disc that received considerable radio play in Brazil.

It was quite clear that Céu's sound has evolved significantly since her self-titled debut release (*Six Degrees*, 2005). She has taken her music in a more soulful direction—evidence of this was the contrast that the new songs have with her earlier hits, which had a modern São Paulo samba influence. She has found a truly distinctive voice, and it is just a matter of time until she receives the recognition she deserves.



## CéU, Say Me, Say It for Always

By Michael van Baker on July 15, 2009

First things first--the sun also rises, the splendor is in the grass, and CéU has a second show tonight at the Triple Door (8 p.m., tickets: \$28). We stumbled across her last time she was in town, touring for her debut album, which ended up nominated for a Latin Grammy.

Listening to her is listening to how a Brazilian hears music, from electro-samba and afrobeat, to soul and R&B. (Last night she opened with the electro-jungle of "Espaçonave" and covered "Takes Two to Tango" from Ray Charles's Duets album.)

You'll never mistake the Brazilian sound, but the loops and spikes of electronica and rubberband bass lines from funk make it an alleyway you've never wandered down before.



Vagarosa, her new album, practically sweats summer (download "Bubula"). It's hot and you don't want to move too fast--relax, lounge around in light cotton or linen, sip something with rum and fruit. You are, of course, wearing your best sunglasses. Every once in a while, your hips start doing revolutions that indicate the presence of strange attractors.

But it is not just watching sunlight streaming by--you are pierced by the beauty of sights, memories, people, and have to sing out. We have no idea what the songs are about--except that her papa used to tell her not to take herself so seriously and "insônia" looks like what it is in English.

CéU stopped and apologized for us not understanding Portuguese: "I'm trying to put the music across with just the sound," she said, and from the roar from the audience, it was working.

Her voice ranges from a whispery lullaby to the textured regret of a reed instrument. For the tour, the brass was left at home, and you get a more of a house remix. Her opener is Italian singer/songwriter Patrizia Laquidara, who sings in Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish.

Her songs are more playful (one includes her doing that thing where you motorboat your lips with an index finger) and show off her vocalizing. She's got a big voice, and the songs sound like they're fun except for the one that was dedicated to either tightrope walkers in general or Philippe Petit specifically. She doesn't speak English so she was miming the dedicatee. That one was more emotional and soaring.

## An album of immense subtlety and constantly surprising contrasts.

Colin Irwin 2009-11-18



It's impossible to talk about Céu without invoking the names of Astrud and Bebel Gilberto.

Yet, while she may be Brazilian and is clearly in thrall to the samba and bossa nova heritage indelibly associated with those artists, Céu – Maria do Céu Whitaker Poças to give her the full name – draws her inspiration as much from the modern urban vibrancy of São Paulo's thriving independent scene as Brazil's sensuous musical history.

This second album is far more ambitious and challenging than its 2005 predecessor, distancing itself boldly from coffee table ambience to incorporate some seriously edgy instrumentation and production techniques courtesy of producers Beto Villares and Gui Amabis and engineer Gustavo Lenza, who keep the album crackling along with an inventive undercurrent of atmospheric soundscapes and technical trickery.

She's a sublime singer – that's almost a given – but her eagerness to go beyond her comfort zone and embrace visionary production ideas, as well as some exciting instrumentalists and particularly vivacious rhythms (notably by Pupillo and Dengue of acclaimed Brazilian band Nação Zumbi) is what helps to decimate genre boundaries and give the album real crossover appeal.

The title is translated from Portuguese as “easygoing”, but while Céu herself sounds blissfully chilled throughout, the sparks fly around her. A wonderfully evocative organ growls menacingly among the choppy rhythms of the slightly spooky Cangote, while wah wah guitars add further intrigue to the funky mix of Comadi and drum loops, samples, multi-tracked vocals and scattered snatches of electronica suddenly appear among horns and intoxicating percussion to keep you guessing where it will all go next.

It's an album of immense subtlety and constantly surprising contrasts. Circus organ duels with electric guitar on Ponteiro, she celebrates the birth of her own daughter with an almost spiritual cover of the Jorge Ben classic Rosa Menina Rosa and uses guest artists to memorable effect, notably Luiz Melodia, who almost steals the album duetting with Céu on the melancholy slow samba Vira Lata.

It oozes class and is Brazilian to the core yet, surreptitiously and almost imperceptibly, guides it to a whole new place.

## CéU: Vagarosa

Charlie Gillett, 1 November 2009

★★★★★



Slinky, but never slick, the Brazilian singer CéU makes music as unusual as her name, which is pronounced as a cockney says "sell" with the double-l turned into a "w". Although it is CéU's name and picture on the front cover, the album feels like a collaboration in which the producers and musicians are equally as important.

It's hard to think of another project that has so radically redefined a region's or nation's music. Jamaica's Lee Perry would be an example, but he was a maverick employing singers and musicians as craftsmen to pursue his particular vision. A better comparison might be the cooperative of musicians in Memphis who during the 1960s recorded as Booker T & the MGs but did their most vital work with Otis Redding in the Stax studios.

This is the third release in a row from CéU that has confounded all my deep-rooted convictions that I don't much like music from Brazil. I have challenged this album again and again to back up the first impression that she and her team really have done it again. Not only done it again, but improved on the early promise of both CéU's debut and the side project called Sonantes, in which she was a vital member.

It is difficult to pick out exactly what makes this album so different from those of contemporaries such as Bebel Gilberto, whose music fades into the background. Maybe a crucial distinction is that every sound is here for a reason. Guitar is the most prominent instrument, often treated with an echoey reverb that suspends each note in the background behind those that follow. Peggy Lee's Fever comes to mind, and perhaps helps place CéU's luxurious tone in the pantheon of great laid-back singers.

One of the most impressive tricks is how live it all seems, as if the vocalist and organist on Cangote really are responding to each other, although almost certainly it was done bit-by-bit in the modern manner. On Comadi something that sounds like a baritone sax honks away, although the credit suggests it must be a mellotron. What is the Portuguese for mothers of invention? These people could claim the title.

The names of the producers, Beto Villares, Gustavo Lenza and Gui Amabis, are surely going to float to the surface of wider recognition in the same way that we long ago learned the name of Memphis's Steve Cropper. It's not often possible to recognise the future as soon as it arrives, but here it is.

## CéU: *Vagarosa* Rating:

By Mike Schiller 6 August 2009



We've barely had a summer here in the northeast United States. It's more like a spring, extended through July for one year only. While this may not be such a bad thing on the surface—really, who could complain about 72-degree days and enough rain to keep the grass green—those of us who are accustomed to a constant string of mid-80 and 90-degree days are kind of missing the heat. With the heat

comes the beach, comes the ice cream truck, comes the pleasant layer of sweat that appears when you just lay in it and do nothing. We wouldn't want the hot weather all the time, but it's nice when it appears.

And yet, even in these abnormally cool temperatures, I swear I can feel that sweat when CéU's *Vagarosa* arrives on the stereo. Her voice just oozes heat, her songs evoke the bending of the light above a freshly paved road on a mid-August afternoon.

She begins simply with a song called "Sobre o Amor e Seu Trabalho Silencioso", just her voice, Rodrigo Campos' spritely cavaquinho, and the faint sound of record hiss and pops. The sound is a happy one, the sound of an artist content with her life and her music, a promise to hold true to the leisurely pace promised by the album title. It's the song that follows, however, that truly begins to bring the heat of *Vagarosa* to the forefront. Equally informed by Portishead and Bob Marley, "Cangote" (released earlier this year on an EP that shared its name) ambles and stumbles along with a record scratch here and an organ hit there, with CéU's flawless vocal line peering over the top of all of it, tying it all together in a way that sounds both immediately familiar and utterly Brazilian.

What's it all about, you ask? Damned if I know—a cool two lines on the entire album are in English and my Portugese is, uh, a little rusty. The truth is, you don't need to know. It hardly matters what it's about. You can read somewhere that "Cangote" is a love song, and "Sonâmbulo" is about a sleepwalker, but even knowing these things is hardly enough to alter your perception of the songs; quite simply, they're lovely, sleepy little pieces that mostly float by so gently that you'll hardly notice them unless you make a point of listening.

Despite all the fawning in the above few paragraphs, there is a criticism that can be levelled at CéU: Listening to her for too long starts to make her sound like the Brazilian Norah Jones. Perhaps that's hardly a criticism, given the amount of crossover success that Ms. Jones has had in both the smooth jazz and country arenas, and the amount of respect she seems to be able to maintain even in the wake of that success. The problem is that CéU is clearly a talented vocalist, and yet for the whole of *Vagarosa*, she only deigns to offer a fraction of that to her

listeners. She spends 90% of the album singing in breathy, hushed tones, and while that segment of her vocal skills is nearly unparalleled, 12 or 13 songs in, you sort of wish she'd start belting for a second, or sing angry, or even go outside the two octaves she sticks with for so much of the album.

Of course, to do so would contradict the very title of the album, killing the very mood she spends so much time creating. Perhaps she's sticking to that old adage of "leave them wanting more," offering mere hints at her full potential that she can go ahead and explore on future releases. It's possible that she just wanted to see what she could do on an album that's not backed by Starbucks as her self-titled debut was. Or, just maybe, she simply wanted to make some music that she could listen to with her infant child in the privacy of her own home.



Whatever the motivation, *Vagarosa* is a peaceful bit of summer that transcends the "world music" label it will inevitably be tagged with. "Cangote", the vaguely Middle Eastern "Bubuia", the almost propulsive (but still gentle) cover of Jorge Ben's "Rosa Menina Rosa"...these are songs that go beyond the idea of genre, embracing multiple styles as effortlessly as stepping across a crack in the sidewalk. CéU may never let it all out on *Vagarosa*, but what she does let us see is pure beauty.

## Getting Stuck on Céu's 'Varagosa'

July 21st 2009 4:30PM by Steve Hochman



'Sobre o Amor e Seu Trabalho Silencioso,' the opening song on Céu's new second album, 'Vagarosa,' will be a revelation to anyone who might have dismissed the Brazilian singer's star-making 2007 debut as merely another nova bossa nova blend of cool vocals and contemporary club/lounge production. With just Rodrigo Campos' cavaquinho (sort of a Brazilian ukulele) backing Céu's lilting voice, this song entrances in a way completely opposite of the first album: no electronics, no cross-culture gimmicks -- just a stripped-down, vulnerable mix of sweetness in sound and emotional exploration in the vocals.

And then the next song carries on the exact same tone. How cool! And the next, as well ... and the next ... oh, wait! There's something wrong with the CD so that it keeps playing the first song over and over.

"That's good that you liked the first song," says Céu, laughing when told of the defect. Not to mention laughing at the listener's failure to realize what was going on until it had played a few times. Hey! It's a short song, and a cool vibe. Very easy to get lost in it. The big problem, though, is that first misimpression seemed certain to dissolve into a letdown with the hearing of the *real* rest of the album. No dice. The whole set is full of revelations -- some as far aesthetically from that simple, naturalistic opening as possible. The biggest revelation, though, is that the first album didn't really present a true representation of this artist.

"When you are in a situation, you cannot understand it exactly," she says of her debut. "I didn't even know I could compose and do my own music and travel around with a band. I never imagined something like this. I wanted to show first my influences. This second one, I wanted to see myself."

It's an impressive sight. The view takes in classic samba, bossa nova, reggae dub, Jamaican nyabingi, psychedelia and ambient jazz, among others, often overlapping or gene-spliced into a very distinct and very personal landscape. And against that are lyrics that link the old traditions taught by her musicologist father to new traditions she's carrying on in her new role as parent, all with a very distinctive and colorful perspective. Remarkably, all of these things come together in one song, arguably the album's centerpiece and artistic zenith. 'Rosa Menina Rosa,' a song originated with '60s-'70s Brazil legend Jorge Ben in an arrangement inspired by a version from São Paulo band Los Sebosos Postizos (which plays with her on the track). Its swirl of trippy guitar, vibraphone, organ and dubbed-out rhythms around Céu's casually seductive singing creates an ambiance that's both past and future. And at the core is an ultimate intimacy.

## Céu, 'Rosa Menina Rosa'

"Rosa is the name of my daughter," Céu explains. "This is a song I sang to her."

Baby Rosa herself is one of the keys to her mom's desire to more fully express herself this time around.

"A lot of things happened since I released my first one," she says. "Traveled around with my music -- to be with the band was great. Also I got pregnant, had my daughter. A lot of changes. For this second album, I just wanted to somehow go back to the essence of the music in my life. Music is such an important thing, and 'Vagarosa,' the name of the album -- I don't know how to exactly translate, but it means 'slowly.' With all the things that happened, I wanted to go down and try with all the new technologies, information, things you need to do day by day, just to slow down, to be in the places I am, not be in places traveling around. That was the idea of the album. Also, it's the second one, I was more on me, you know."

She laughs suddenly as she grasps for fitting words and phrases, apologetically saying, "My English is weird."

"To put myself more," she concludes. "Not just the influences."

So she has 'Rosa' for her daughter. And she has 'Papa' for her father, reminding herself of some parental wisdom.

"It was a moment when everything was happening: 'You must do this and that,'" she says. "Was doing a lot of shows. And I was just having a conversation with my father and he said I should sometimes not take everything so serious. Serious is another thing, not your life. Misery is much more serious. The war is serious. So it was a great conversation with my father."

And with that, she was free to explore the great wealth of music in her life. What jumps out of the mix most prominently are the Jamaican sounds, though the influences are often integrated fully in with other sounds, on such tracks as 'Bubuia' making for a true São Paulo-Kingston hybrid:

## Céu, 'Bubuia'

"I think my show when I played live, it was already more a Jamaican vibe," she says. "I don't know exactly when it started. I probably could say I was 15 years old maybe. I'm a big fan of dub and dancehall. I grew up in a musical family listening to especially traditional music from Brazil -- old-school sambas, music from the northeast. I'm a big fan of Baden Powell, of various traditional things. But I also liked a lot of Jamaican and Afrobeat stuff too. I have a lot of Studio One albums, like the Upsetters, King Tubby, Lee Perry, all this. Nice artists. It's everything -- the vibe, the beat, the melody."

"I think just the way I write my melodies, the music and also the lyrics, it's kind of a personal diary. I live in a huge city, so many people from all over Brazil here, from north to south. It's a big mixture of so many cultures. I think I have something that is just part of my culture. I bring a lot of different influences, but I try to reduce all this on my own vision of music. If I'm going to do a samba album -- no, I'm not just samba. It's not just a rhythm. It's a whole way you live your life, and I'm not like this. I've traveled. I had the opportunity to live in New York. And these things change you. I try for my music to be true to myself as a diary. It's traditional music but from the whole Brazilian culture."

In that regard, 'Espaçonave,' the last song on the album, might be the most "traditional." Well, as traditional as something with a title that translates as "spaceship" can be. In this case, the traditions trace to Os Mutantes, the out-there ensemble that was at the core of the Beatles-inspired, anything-goes tropicalia movement of the '60s and '70s. Of course, adding her own twists give the song a funky skip almost out of New Orleans via P-Funk and Prince.

"The song starts like a Nyabinghi song," Céu says. "I was here in São Paulo and full of all this pollution and concrete, and I just wanted to get away. I was making a connection between the nature and a spaceship -- Mother Nature -- It's a kind of psychedelic song."

But now having gone all the way on this journey to the stratosphere, let's suppose the whole album *had* been along the lines of that persistent opener, 'Sobre o Amor e Seu Trabalho Silencioso.' From the way Céu talks about the song, that wouldn't be a bad thing at all.

"It's about the chemical process when you fall in love -- the love thing," she says. "When you meet someone and all the things start to happen in your body as the silence works, you don't have to do nothing. It just happens to you."

## Céu interview: Starbucks and soaps made me a star

As Brazilian singer Céu arrives in Britain, she talks about her remarkable route to global fame.

By Peter Culshaw 11:19 AM BST 15 Jul 2010



Céu is the latest in a strong line of fabulous Brazilian female singers – from bossa nova queen Astrud Gilberto in the Sixties to her step-daughter Bebel Gilberto in the Noughties – to fascinate foreign audiences. But, if she is guilty, as some have accused her, of designing her music for export, she really should have come up with an easier name. The closest English pronunciation for her name, which means “sky”, is “Cell”, but even that doesn’t get close to the correct Brazilian twang.

She first came to attention via the unlikely route of Starbucks, who decided to start their own label Hear Music and put out Paul McCartney and Céu in 2006 as their first releases. “I was in the middle of nowhere, had put out an album on a very small Brazilian label, and I got a strange call from a guy who said he could get my record into every Starbucks in the States,” she says.

Facing the current music industry crisis in how to sell CDs, she jumped at the chance: “I had some criticism from my anti-globalisation friends, but actually Starbucks were very respectful.” The result was, apart from lots of people getting an enjoyable soundtrack at they sipped their Frappuccinos, that her album did better than any Brazilian artist in the States since the glory days of The Girl From Ipanema.

The follow-up could have been fraught. It was, she says, like qualifying for the World Cup. “Now you are in the finals and a real contender.” Unlike many in the same situation, “nerves didn’t get the better of me. I knew a lot of people were expecting a lot from me, and I was also pregnant and worried about that, but I decided to focus on being honest and ended up having a lot of fun in the studio.”

The resulting album, *Vagarosa*, which means, more or less, “laid-back”, is a considerable step forward from her assured debut, and is a wonderful and original collage of stripped-back soul grooves, languid singing and influences as varied as Jamaican ragga and dancehall, trip hop, and antique sambas from the Thirties. The contradiction of the album is that, despite its global influences, it is very much a product of contemporary São

Paulo which has become the centre of the Brazilian music business “It’s a crazy city. It’s like a thousand cities inside one.”

I caught up with her in Porto, Portugal, a couple of weeks ago, where she faced a tough gig. Her performance at the iconic Rem Koolhaas-designed concert space Casa Da Música came directly after Portugal were knocked out of the World Cup by arch-rivals Spain. The fact that she managed to lift the palpable gloom was testament to her tight band, and the instant pop classics she played from the new album. Included were the sensual love song Cangote, the densely funky Comadi “about the struggle of women in life”, and more philosophical numbers like Bubuia, which says you have to see the problems in life as bubbles on a wave. She even manages to breathe new life into the Fifties Louis Armstrong chestnut It Takes Two to Tango.

There are plenty of top Brazilian names in London this summer – from Caetano Veloso to Gilberto Gil, Maria Bethânia and Os Mutantes. All great artists, but nearly all from one state, Bahia, and all of them over 60. Céu feels that Europeans aren’t exposed to the intensely vibrant music from São Paulo and other states in Brazil, a country which, after all, is bigger than Europe. “I love those artists, but it’s like if you had a European festival in Brazil and you only got to hear old French guys.”

Her good fortune with Starbucks gave her a leg-up internationally, but she says: “It’s always been difficult for alternative music to get a big audience in Brazil.” The best way to do so is to be used as a soundtrack to the hugely popular telenovelas, TV soap operas. She has several songs on them now. The subgenre of soap that seems to love her most are what they call in Brazil “Bang Bangs”, Westerns with cowboys.

Starbucks, cowboy soap operas – the means of reaching an audience these days may differ from the past, but Céu says: “Things are looking pretty positive right now. I do seem to be reaching an audience, even if not in the way I imagined.”