



## **Saga**

*The stunning debut album by Brazilian jazz guitarist Rodrigo Lima*

### **2-CD set featuring:**

*Hubert Laws, Anat Cohen, Mike Mainieri, Hermeto Pascoal, Don Sebesky, Sammy Figueroa, Raul de Souza, Ithamara Koorax, Joao Palma, Laudir de Oliveira, Hugo Fattoruso*

**Cover Photo by**  
*Pete Turner*

**Produced by**  
*Arnaldo DeSouteiro for JSR*

One of the most inventive artists to come along from Brazil in recent years, Rodrigo Lima is releasing his debut album as a leader, **Saga**, a stunning 2-CD set that has the brilliant guitarist/composer/arranger working in modes that range from his Brazilian samba & bossa roots to chamber jazz, with lots of stops in between. Produced by Arnaldo DeSouteiro (João Gilberto, Luiz Bonfá, Deodato) for the Jazz Station Records (JSR) label, recorded in LA, NY, Rio and Curitiba, **Saga** features an all-star cast: Hubert Laws, Anat Cohen, Don Sebesky, Mike Mainieri, Hermeto Pascoal, Ithamara Koorax, Sammy Figueroa, Raul de Souza, Hugo Fattoruso, Joao Palma and Laudir de Oliveira, to name a few. The cover pic is by the legendary photographer Pete Turner (John Coltrane, Quincy Jones, Ray Charles, Oscar Peterson, Weather Report), and the list of engineers includes the renowned Jay Messina (Miles Davis, John Lennon, Aerosmith and the Rolling Stones.)

The repertoire brings songs based on several Brazilian rhythms such as choro (“Anat’s Song”), baião (“Brasileirão”), samba (“Samba da Mistura”) and bossa nova (“Altinho”),

plus two tunes composed by Brazilian living genius Hermeto Pascoal specially to this album, some experimental adventures, and the 20-minute long “Brahms,” a loose jazz version of Johannes Brahms’ Symphony #3.

Lima plays acoustic guitar with a deftness that rivals some of his most notable Brazilian predecessors like Luiz Bonfá and Laurindo Almeida – and that includes some of the best bossa and choro talents as well, blended with the influence of Jim Hall and Pat Metheny. The range of settings in the album is varied, but extremely unified too, thanks to a coherent sense of production and presentation that really holds the listener’s interest throughout. In some songs, Lima’s vocal lines complement the mesmerizing melodies and the soulful guitar solos.

An intuitive guitar ace whose instincts and passions are balanced by his versatility and technical dexterity, Rodrigo Lima is also an actor with multiple awards for his work on Brazilian TV and movie productions, for which he often writes the soundtracks as well. He has also appeared as a member of singer Ithamara Koorax’s band on European and Asian tours. The rich musical diversity of Brazil, particularly the artistry of Antonio Carlos Jobim, Dorival Caymmi, Hermeto Pascoal, Baden Powell, Luiz Bonfá, Laurindo Almeida and Joao Gilberto, proved an undeniable influence on Lima’s solid musical background. His parents loved jazz, so he grew up listening to Bill Evans, Toots Thielemans, Chet Baker, Hubert Laws and literally any album arranged by Don Sebesky. As showcased on **Saga**, Lima continues to combine a wide variety of musical ingredients into new forms of highly creative musical expressions. His intense dedication to his craft is matched by his impeccable musicality. His musical horizons are truly unlimited. ■

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From Heitor Villa-Lobos to Oscar Castro-Neves to Luiz Bonfá, the guitar has a long and rich history in Brazilian music. Virtuoso guitarist Laurindo Almeida fused Brazilian rhythms with cool jazz when he teamed up with American alto saxophonist Bud Shank for their landmark “Brazilliance” sessions of 1953; the iconic João Gilberto took the fusion of Brazilian rhythms and cool jazz to the next level when he played the samba on his acoustic guitar and set off the bossa nova explosion in the late 1950s. And after all these years, the guitar continues to offer many possibilities for providers of Brazilian jazz: Rodrigo Lima shows us some of them on his diverse two-CD set, *Saga*.

Produced by Arnaldo DeSouteiro – Brazil’s top jazz producer – in Rio de Janeiro and Curitiba, Brazil as well as in New York City and Los Angeles, *Saga* unites Lima with a broad range of musicians from Brazil, the United States and other parts of the world. The long list of Brazilian greats who join Lima on *Saga* includes, among others, Raul de Souza on trombone, Hermeto Pascoal on piano & melodica, Ithamara Koorax on vocals, and João Palma and Zé Eduardo Nazário on drums – and hailing from the U.S. are Hubert Laws (one of the top jazz flutists of the last 50 years), vibist Mike Mainieri, Bronx-born percussionist Sammy Figueroa and the famous arranger Don Sebesky. Other contributors to *Saga* include German bassist Frank Herzberg and Uruguayan pianist/keyboardist Hugo Fattoruso, who has played with so many Brazilian stars over the years (Airtó, Flora Purim, Djavan, Chico Buarque) that some people assume he is Brazilian. And with this impressive cast on board, Lima soars as both a guitarist and a composer.

Brazil, the largest country in Latin America, has been the birthplace of many different rhythms and styles of music over the



**Rodrigo Lima**

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years – and Lima reminds us of that fact by fusing jazz with everything from samba on “Canção Praieira” (which he dedicates to composer Dorival Caymmi) and “Samba de Mistura” to choro on “Novos Cariocas (Anat’s Song)” to baião on “Brasileirão.” The title “Brasileirão” combines the word “brasileiro” (which means “Brazilian” in Portuguese) with the word “baião,” which is the name of an infectious rhythm from Northeastern Brazil. The late Luiz Gonzaga, remembered as the King of Baião, did a lot to popularize that rhythm when he recorded his hit single “Baião” back in 1946 – and Lima puts his own stamp on nordeste music with the help of his Uruguayan friend Fattoruso, who is heard on both acoustic piano and harpsichord.

Employing Fattoruso on harpsichord, Lima recalls, was DeSouteiro’s idea – and Fattoruso didn’t know he would be playing that instrument until he got to the studio. Lima explains: “Arnaldo said, ‘Let’s bring a harpsichord and give Hugo Fattoruso and us a gift.’ When Hugo arrived in the studio and

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looked at that harpsichord, he said: 'Incredible instrument! Beautiful.' And I said: 'Do you know who is going to play it? You.'" Hugo said, 'I can't believe it!'"

"Brasileirão" features two different bassists: Herzberg on acoustic bass and Jamil Joanes on electric bass. Lima himself plays a combination of electric guitar and acoustic classical guitar on **Saga**, and while Fattoruso plays acoustic piano on "Brasileirão" and the gentle ballad "Porta Aflora," he plays Fender Rhodes and some vintage analog synths on "Flying Waltz," "OPA!" and "Pilotos."

The fact that **Saga** uses both electric and acoustic instruments liberally says a lot about Lima and DeSouteiro's musical outlook: DeSouteiro has often credited producer Creed Taylor (founder of both the Impulse! and CTI labels) as a major influence, and like Taylor, DeSouteiro firmly believes that electric instruments and the influence of funk and rock have their place in jazz expression.

"Both Rodrigo and I love the Fender Rhodes," DeSouteiro emphasizes. "We are neither purists nor jazz snobs, so we believe that the Rhodes electric piano can have its own sound and identity when in the hands of mastermind players like Bill Evans, Ahmad Jamal, Bob James, Herbie Hancock, Joe Sample and Hugo Fattoruso, to name a few."

"Novos Cariocas (Anat's Song)," which features Israeli improviser Anat Cohen on clarinet and tenor saxophone, draws on both samba and choro. Lima remembers that when he first met Cohen, he had no idea she wasn't Brazilian. "A few years ago, I went to a roda de choro – which is kind of a choro jam session," Lima notes. "And there was a girl playing clarinet. She was so cool, brilliant and shiny. The way she played was really special. There were some ladies nearby talking, and one of them said, 'This girl is from Israel.' I was shocked! How could

any foreign person play and understand so many things about the particularities of Brazilian music? I became so impressed that I wrote a tune and dedicated it to her the following week."

"Novos Cariocas (Anat's Song)" starts out as a choro before turning into a samba. Lima explains, "There's a joke we do in this tune, making a drastic change. It begins like a traditional choro, with the instrumentation of a traditional choro band: classical guitar, cavaquinho, bandolim, clarinet and some trombone counterpoints. So maybe, the listener can think that it's a choro. But in the middle, the atmosphere changes – and this tune becomes a samba-jazz with another band: piano, bass, drums, guitar and tenor sax."

Although much of the album's inspiration comes from Brazil and the United States, "A la Vuelta" was influenced by Lima's travels in Chile, Peru and Bolivia. Lima thinks of "A la Vuelta" as having "a kind of Andean style" as well as elements of the great American guitarist Pat Metheny.

In addition to his talents as a guitarist and composer, Lima is an actor. "Flying Waltz," which boasts a lush string arrangement by Sebesky and features Hubert Laws on flute, is a piece that Lima wrote for his short film "O Casamento de Mario e Fia" (The Marriage of Mario and Fia). "Don is one of the kindest men I ever met in my life," Lima asserts, "and after the session we became friends. Don conducted the arrangement for 'Flying Waltz' just like an angel, and the notes he wrote are just wonderful."

DeSouteiro adds: "Don Sebesky is one of the best and most important arrangers in music history, from Wes Montgomery, George Benson and Chet Baker to John Pizzarelli, Larry Coryell and Rod Stewart. When Rodrigo met Don during the recording sessions in New York for the 'Flying Waltz' track, they imme-

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dially clicked. In the end of the session, you could swear they were friends for decades.”

“Altinho” is a sensuous, easygoing bossa nova that features the legendary Joao Palma (Antonio Carlos Jobim’s drummer from 1969 to 1977, having played on such albums as “Stone Flower,” “Tide” and “Urubu,” and who has also recorded with Frank Sinatra, Sergio Mendes, Paul Desmond, Astrud Gilberto, Stanley Turrentine and Michael Franks), and the world-class percussionist Laudir de Oliveira (Joe Cocker, Chick Corea and a member of the Chicago group during their heyday of “Happy Man,” “If You Leave Me Now” and other huge hits.) As Lima notes, “Altinho is a kind of soccer game that the beautiful girls from Ipanema play on the beach, near the sea.”

The optimistic “Vida Nova” (the title means “New Life” in Portuguese) boasts Fattoruso on yet another instrument: the accordion, and Lima wrote the song after being separated from his first wife. He has since remarried. “When I was first separated from my first wife,” Lima recalls, “I was very sad. But six months later, I became relieved and was able to have a new life. So I wrote ‘Vida Nova,’ which is full of passion and hope.

“OPA!” is named after the jazz-rock fusion band that Fattoruso led in the 1970s and 1980s, and **Saga** makes an unexpected detour into avant-garde territory with the frantic “Ânima 2” – which Lima describes as having “kind of a primitive mood” and being “a mix between jazz, rock, fusion and African music.” Meanwhile, Lima plays unaccompanied acoustic solo guitar on “A Velha Sozinha,” an introspective piece he says was meant to depict “an old and lonely woman.”

Although **Saga** is mostly instrumental, Lima sings on “Porta Aflora” (which finds him putting music to the Portuguese words of poet Pedro Rocha). And singers Ithamara Koorax

and Aline Morena are featured on “Palinha do Vinho,” a song that Pascoal wrote for Lima, DeSouteiro and Koorax. “In 2010,” Lima remembers, “Ithamara Koorax invited me to tour with her. When we were in Curitiba, the Brazilian city where Hermeto currently lives, we met him and his beautiful wife, the great singer Aline Morena. They invited us to dinner. Suddenly, during our dinner, Hermeto took a pen and started to write a tune on a piece of paper. We stopped our conversation to see what Hermeto was doing, and he said: ‘No! Please keep talking, you are inspiring me.’ We started to talk again. Some minutes later, ‘Palinha do Vinho’ was born with both harmony and melody complete and dedicated to us. It was an incredible night.”

After “Palinha do Vinho” was recorded, the people in the studio felt that Lima’s rapport with Pascoal was so strong that they should record something else together – and that was how the improvised Lima/Pascoal duet “Nosso Borogodó Coió” came about. “When we finished Hermeto’s recording session on ‘Palinha do Vinho,’ the sensation was that it was incredible and amazing but that we could have something more. Nobody talked about it – it was just something in the air. Everyone in that studio room knew it. So we started to talk and play – we didn’t want the end of that magical moment – and then sud-

**Rodrigo Lima**

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denly, Aline said, 'Why don't you make some music now?' Hermeto said, 'Yes! Can you do it? I said, 'I can do it.' And we did that crazy music, totally improvised and together, with our open hearts."

With the help of de Souza, Mainieri, Fattoruso, Herzberg, Figueroa and Nazário, Lima and DeSouteiro draw on the European classical tradition on an imaginative 20-minute performance of Johannes Brahms' 1883 composition "Symphony No. 3 in F Major, Movement 3" – which receives a Brazilian jazz makeover on *Saga*. The idea to acknowledge Brahms occurred to DeSouteiro when he was working on Koorax's 2013 release, "Opus Clássico," and Lima describes their arrangement as "a gift for our friend Raul de Souza."

"When we met with Raul to invite him to play on my album, he told us that he just loved Brahms," Lima notes. "Arnaldo came up with the idea to have this enormous track, give Raul two choruses to improvise, and finish with vibe improvisation. I asked Arnaldo, 'Who is going to play the vibes?,' and he said, 'Mike Mainieri, of course.' Oh my God! Mike Mainieri playing on my album – is that possible? Yes, it is! I contacted Mike, and he was just a gentleman – a very nice man. He accepted my invitation to record and did a great job."

DeSouteiro interjects: "Both Rodrigo and I are big fans of the late guitarist Jim Hall – especially his *Concierto* album for CTI, which includes a 20-minute jazz version of Joaquín Rodrigo's 'Concierto de Aranjuez.' That track was the basic inspiration for our adaptation of Brahms' 'Symphony #3' in terms of having great improvisers doing loose solos over a sumptuous composition. But it's not an imitation at all – we used completely different instrumentation. The solos on Hall's 'Concierto' are played by electric guitar, acoustic piano, alto sax and trumpet, but Rodrigo's Brahms

is played by acoustic guitar, electric piano, vibes and trombone. It's a lush arrangement, very elegant. But it's never mellow. Rodrigo's solo includes blues and bop lines. Fattoruso's solo is pure poetry, with single-note lines. And Mike Mainieri and Raul de Souza's statements are very powerful, true floods of ideas."

Raul De Souza is also featured on "Novos Cariocas (Anat's Song)" and the caressing "Canção Praieira." DeSouteiro observes: "Raul de Souza's solo on 'Canção Praieira' is astonishing for the fluency of ideas, the creative phrasing, and the beautiful, velvet-like tone of his trombone playing." Raul is one of the best all-time trombonists in jazz history, and he reached his highest level of popularity when he lived in the USA in the 1970s and recorded with Sonny Rollins, Cal Tjader, J.J. Johnson, Cannonball Adderley, Airto, Flora Purim and many others.

The fact that Lima plays his guitar so skillfully no doubt has a lot to do with the fact that he had skillful teachers from an early age. Born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on December 27, 1975, Lima was only seven when he began to study the guitar and immerse himself in the richness of Brazilian music. The first song he learned to play was Baden Powell's "Berimbau," and after that, one of Lima's music teachers, Chico Cariri, introduced him to the music of Heitor Villa-Lobos. By the age of 15, Lima had made so much progress on the guitar that he went on tour with Cariri.

It was also at the age of 15 that Lima began studying with guitarists Felipe Trotta and Dino 7 Cordas. Around that time, Lima was accepted to UNIRIO University in Rio de Janeiro (where he continued his musical studies with guitarists Nicolas de Souza Barros and Maria Haro and took some harmony classes with Antonio Guerreiro before earning his degree). "Nicolas and Maria took me to another level in music and guitar technique," Lima remem-

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bers. "Nicolas, Maria and Antonio played a key part in my life."

During his musical studies, Lima was inspired not only by Brazil's contributions to jazz, classical, folk and pop guitar, but also, by many great jazz guitarists who came from the United States. Lima also absorbed some Spanish flamenco guitar along the way.

"I fell in love with the jazz guitar – all kinds of jazz guitarists, from Jim Hall to Pat Metheny to Luiz Bonfá by listening to their records," Lima explains. "One album that my father listened to a lot was 'Friday Night In San Francisco', which was my introduction to the music of Al DiMeola, Paco De Lucía and John McLaughlin."

Whether he is playing electric guitar or acoustic guitar, Lima's enthusiasm is never in doubt on **Saga** – and the fact that Lima and DeSouteiro work with so many of their idols on this release clearly encourages that enthusiasm. DeSouteiro stresses: "Although recorded in many different studios in Brazil and the USA, **Saga** is a very organic album because we knew from the beginning what we were looking for in terms of sonority. We knew the musicians we wanted for each track. Many of the tunes were composed with them on Rodrigo's mind. He grew up listening to these guys: Don Sebesky, Hubert Laws, Raul de Souza, Hermeto Pascoal, Hugo Fattoruso, Mike Mainieri. During the many travels Rodrigo and I made together all over the world when he was a member of Ithamara Koorax's band – from Serbia to South Korea – he was always listening to their albums on his .mp3/iPad player. So it's like Rodrigo already had an intimacy with those musicians. It's as if they had been friends for many years."

DeSouteiro continues: "I have been fortunate to work with some geniuses during my 34-year career as a recording producer. From my fellow Brazilians João Gilberto, Luiz Bonfá,



**Rodrigo Lima**

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Antonio Carlos Jobim, João Donato, Claudio Roditi, Mario Castro-Neves, and Eumir Deodato to such jazz masters as Herbie Hancock, Ron Carter, Gonzalo Rubalcaba, Larry Coryell and many others. But it was a very special joy to work with Rodrigo Lima. He's one of the most talented composers and instrumentalists I've ever met. His creativity is astonishing. For sure, **Saga** is one of the best albums I've ever produced." ■

### **Alex Henderson, November 2014**

*Alex Henderson's work has appeared in Billboard, Spin, Salon.com, Creem, The L.A. Weekly, AlterNet, JazzTimes, Jazziz, HITS, The New York City Jazz Record, Skin Two, Jazz Inside Magazine, Black Beat, The Pasadena Weekly, Cash Box, Black Radio Exclusive (BRE), CD Review, Music Connection and many other well-known publications. Henderson (alexvhenderson.com) also contributed several thousand CD reviews to the popular Allmusic.com website and The All Music Guide's series of music reference books.*