



// Everyone thinks the young generation is the future... to me, working with Milton is like getting close to the future //
– esperanza spalding

found-sound chatter that features in the album's short interludes. On 'outra planeta' (Another Planet) there's laughter, and breezy philosophy.

"The music for me is basically friendship, love, children, ocean, the life," says Nascimento, sage-like in his winter years. The icon was nearing the end of his 2021 'Last Session' tour - which took in the UK and Europe and a series of emotional farewell concerts at home - that Augusto Nascimento contacted spalding and asked her to create a final record with his father.

"He told me, 'It should be you and him, Milton and esperanza, produced by you, but you need to do it now while his voice is warmed up from his tour,'" she has said.

spalding loves to work with elders she admires. Soon after graduating from Berklee, aided by the critical and commercial success of her 2006 debut *Junjo* but especially its 2008 follow-up *Esperanza*, she won ongoing engagements with the A-list likes of tenor saxophonist Joe Lovano, bassist Charlie Hayden, violinist Regina Carter and vibraphonist Gary Burton (later, she'd set aside the bass to sing in a run of lively duo shows at the Village Vanguard with pianist and composer Fred Hersch). But it was 2010's *Chamber Music Society* (titled for the Oregon community orchestra in which she played self-taught violin as a five-year-old) that expanded her style and, with guest vocal appearances from Gretchen Parlato and indeed, Milton Nascimento, her horizons (it also won her a Grammy for Best New Artist).

Photo: Pedro Napolitano

It was Herbie Hancock, ever encouraging of rising stars [see this month's Taking Off feature on Jahari Stampley, p22], who had raved about Spalding's work to Nascimento, thus encouraging the Brazilian to accept an invitation to duet on the *Chamber Music Society* track 'Apple Blossom'.

"One of my first instruments was the bass, and I used to sing and play [in a jazz trio as a teenager]," says Nascimento. "Then I saw a person doing the same thing, beautifully, and then it was a clash of souls. This younger generation [of musicians] saves lives because they are doing the most beautiful thing they can by putting their hearts forward, playing and singing. It's the sound of the world."

The two musicians, younger and elder, had shared the stage at the 2011 Rock in Rio Festival, after which Spalding made a habit of visiting Nascimento whenever she is in Brazil. Their friendship was helped, probably, by the fact that Spalding isn't just a musical boundary-pusher but a philanthropist, activist, environmentalist and seeker. Her romantic, thought-provoking, sometimes didactic eighth studio album, 2021's *Songwrights Apothecary Lab*, examined the therapeutic power of music alongside a host of like-minded musicians and researchers. Her single 'Não Ao Marco Temporal', released by Concord in February 2024, stands as a protest anthem against the Temporal Framework initiative that threatened Indigenous land rights, and a reminder of fragile victories and ongoing struggles.

Nascimento, too, is a staunch environmentalist, land rights advocate and political left-leader. Who, having weathered the tyranny of the military dictatorship in Brazil through 1964 until 1985 - his 1973 album *Milagro dos Peixes* features only wordless vocalese after his lyrics were veto-ed, while his small role in Werner Herzog's 1982 Amazon jungle-set film epic *Fitzcarraldo* made him a champion of Indigenous communities - refuses to ever utter the name of far-right leader and climate criminal Jair Bolsonaro.

"I hope that young people don't get caught up in this dictator business because they don't understand what it was like," Nascimento has said. It is a palpably precious friendship, this meeting of kindred spirits, this clashing of souls, and one which has flourished through mutual respect. Asked how it feels to be working with such an elder, with some of the greatest long-established names in music, Spalding says that the privilege is hers, that working intergenerationally is like being continually guided, shown the way.

"A friend of mine in Portland who's in his 70s once remarked that while everyone thinks the younger generation is the future, that phrase should actually be applied to the previous generation because they give the younger generation the possibility and space and daring to be able to go forward," she says. "So, to me, [working with Nascimento] is like getting close to the future, being in touch with these portals. Chico Buarque, Caetano Veloso, Milton Nascimento ..."

She lists several Brazilian music legends: "The possibilities they opened!"

For his part, Nascimento is delighted to have worked his magical energy on *Milton + esperanza*, an album that is winning the sort of accolades that *Clube de Esquina* continues to garner. While he and Spalding had wanted to work together for several years, finally all the elements dovetailed. It was right place, right time. And so much happiness.

"Valeu a pena," he says. "It was worth the wait." **D**