

LIVE: Sergio Mendes @ Cheltenham Jazz Festival 4/5/2019

Written by Charles Waring

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At 78 years old, Brazilian music legend, **Sergio Mendes** still knows how to get his groove on. The veteran keyboard player brought the sunshine and warmth of his native country's music to light up a chilly Cheltenham afternoon. Leading from a centre stage keyboard, a fedora-wearing Mendes led his well-drilled seven-piece band through an enjoyable tour of his back catalogue. Singers Gracinha Leporace - Mendes' wife of many years - and Katie Hampton were the main focus of the music; their voices sensuously entwined on material that ranged from bossa nova classics like 'The Girl From Ipanema, ' and 'One Note Samba' - both written by Mendes' friend and mentor, the legendary Antonio Carlos Jobim - to big US hits he enjoyed with Brasil 66 in the 1960s. The latter included a samba-infused reconfiguration of the Beatles' ballad, 'Fool On The Hill' and a hypnotic take on Burt Bacharach & Hal David's immortal paean to desire, 'The Look Of Love.'

To add a contemporary twist and no doubt inspired by his successful collaboration with the Black Eyes Peas on three hit albums in 2006 ('Timeless'), 2008 ('Incanto'), and 2014 ('Magic'), Mendes also featured a rapper on a couple of songs (including the Jobim-penned 'Surfboard'). Though purists in the audience might have been irritated by his presence, judging from the enthusiastic reception his energetic rhyming couplets received, his inclusion in the band was a popular one. In terms of its musicianship, Mendes' band couldn't be faulted ("this is the best band I've had in many, many years," he told the audience). On bass was the legendary Philadelphia player, Alphonso Johnson - whom fusion aficionados would recall from his work with Weather Report and George Duke in the mid-'70s - while on saxophone, flute, keyboards and additional vocals was another American, Scott Mayo, who duetted with Katie Hampton on Mendes' 1983 US hit, the Barry Mann-Cynthia Weill MOR ballad, 'Never Gonna Let You Go.'

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, Mendes closed his packed-out show with his euphoric signature tune, the anthemic 'Mas Que Nada,' which ended the afternoon on a blissed-out high and made Cheltenham seem - at least for 75 minutes - like Rio de Janeiro at carnival time.

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Read SJF's interview with Sergio Mendes here:

<http://www.soulandjazzandfunk.com/interviews/6100-still-swinging-sergio-mendes-talks-cheltenham-sinatra-and-pele.html>