

Memories of Allentown echo in musician's choro beat

[SECOND Edition]

Morning Call - Allentown, Pa.

Author: Diana Morse Special to the Morning Call - Freelance
Date: Aug 20, 2006
Start Page: E.1
Section: ARTS & IDEAS
Document Types: FEATURES
Text Word Count: 992

Document Text

Copyright Morning Call Aug 20, 2006

Before the bossa nova or the samba, there was choro -- the Brazilian song form combining elements of classical music and jazz.

Los Angeles-based Allentown native Ted Falcon has performed choro music in Brazil. On Thursday he brings choro to Allentown Symphony Hall in a concert to celebrate the release of his fourth CD, "Memorias do Brasil," a collection of original choro songs and choro standards by Jacob do Bandolim, Ernesto Nazareth, Hermeto Pascoal, Pixinguinha and Waldir Azevedo.

"This concert is truly a homecoming for me," says the 1988 Allen High School grad, still known locally as Teddy.

Falcon, who began formal music training at 5, credits his father, Allentown musician Marvin Falcon, for his introduction to music. "I remember listening to dad playing Brazilian guitar and jazz. [The songs] were like little stories. He was always experimenting with genre crossing -- not jazz but not classical -- which was very intriguing."

For the Allentown concert, Falcon looks forward to inviting his dad onstage for a duet. "He traveled [to L.A.] for the West Coast CD release party and nearly stole the show playing "Lady Be Good" on the ukulele," Falcon laughs.

The concert in Symphony Hall's intimate Rodale Community Room will be steps away from the Community Music School classrooms where Falcon once taught violin to supplement his income while working as a musician in New York.

In Los Angeles, Falcon continues his teaching tradition, offering classes in ukulele, violin, guitar and mandolin at Silverlake Conservatory of Music, founded in 2001 by Flea of the Red Hot Chile Peppers.

Even while rubbing elbows with West Coast musical royalty, however, Falcon remains loyal to the Queen City.

"Memorias do Brasil" includes Falcon's original "Memories of Home," a tribute to Allentown. "I grew up in the West End," he says. "The song is meaningful and spiritual to me -- its influences are memories of growing up in Allentown -- family, friends, riding my bicycle, Allen-Dieruff football games, going to the farmers market."

Though "Memories of Home" is instrumental, with Falcon on the mandolin, Falcon says he has been urged to add lyrics. "It sure could use them, it's very melodic," he says of the song that features a bossa nova-style rhythm.

A self-described choro musicologist, Falcon explains the genre got its name from "chorar," the Portuguese verb meaning "to cry."

"The music has a sentimental, nostalgic quality to it," he says of the style originating in late 19th century Brazil. "It combines the uplifting beat of African-derived samba rhythm with a feel of old New Orleans ragtime, but also has European flavor. It's more for listening than for dancing."

Falcon received a music degree from University of Pittsburgh, where he won the Mellon Jazz Scholarship. It was while pursuing a master's degree in jazz studies at University of Indiana that he fell under the spell of choro music.

"I studied with Brazilian guitarist Marcos Cavalcante, who has become a great friend," he says. "I studied Brazilian rhythm and guitar, and became a guitarist in a choro ensemble. Falcon released his first CD, "Falcon's Quest," at Indiana in 1995, before moving to New York.

To experience choro where it was born, for the past three years Falcon has traveled to Brazil's annual Festival du Choro. During this year's festival, Falcon was invited to perform live on Brazilian national radio with Brazilian ensemble Epoca de Ouro.

Falcon recently completed a book of choro sheet music compositions, "Retratos do Brazil" (Brazilian Portrait) containing 31 choro songs and a CD recording of each piece.

"There were songs at this year's festival that I'd never heard -- and I'm familiar with hundreds of pieces of standard choro repertoire," he says. "I was frustrated because there are no written scores so I couldn't join in those jams."

Falcon transcribed 21 songs from recordings for the book. "These are songs played in Brazil today -- the real thing that's going on," he says. The book also includes 10 original compositions.

Falcon is proficient on 20 musical instruments. He recalls studying music in Allentown's school system with fondness. "In [Muhlenberg] Elementary you had to choose an instrument, so I took Suzuki violin. By sixth grade I was the only one who hadn't quit," he laughs.

That changed at Allen High. "The guys on the wrestling team didn't think [violin] was the coolest instrument, so I was peer- pressured into playing bass."

Falcon has recorded with Suzanne Vega and Ben E. King and made studio recordings for bands Korn, Weezer, The Cure and Linkin Park. His television credits include "The Tonight Show," "Judging Amy" and "Charmed."

In 1999, Falcon left the Big Apple to tour for a year with Ringling Brothers, Barnum & Bailey circus as a violinist in the band. Afterward, he decided to try his luck as a musician in Los Angeles.

On the West Coast, Falcon released "Toreador," (2000) and "The Jamie Papish-Ted Falcon Ensemble -- Songs of the Dance" (2002).

"I've only really pursued mandolin in the past few years," Falcon says. "It's the perfect instrument -- tuned symmetrically so it's difficult to ever play out of tune."

Falcon says the Allentown show will feature his Choro Ensemble. The mandolin and clarinet take the lead instrumental role, followed by 7-string guitars; a cavaquinho, Brazilian predecessor to the mandolin; and pandeiro, a percussion instrument.

While the concert will consist mainly of choro music, there may be some surprises.

"Even though 'Girl From Ipanema' isn't really choro music, audiences are disappointed if we don't play it," he says.

Diana Morse is a freelance writer.

Jodi Duckett,

Arts and Entertainment Editor

jodi.duckett@mcall.com

610-820-6704

THE DETAILS

TED FALCON

What: Allentown native celebrates the release of "Memorias do Brasil," with his Choro Ensemble

When: 8 pm.

Thursday

Where: Symphony Hall, Rodale Room, 23 N. Sixth St., Allentown

Tickets: \$20

Info: 610-432-6715, www.allentownsymphony.org, www.tedfalcon.com

[Illustration]

Contributed photo; Caption: TED FALCON, who grew up in Allentown, returns Thursday for a Brazilian choro concert at Symphony Hall.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission.

Abstract (Document Summary)

Los Angeles-based Allentown native Ted Falcon has performed choro music in Brazil. On Thursday he brings choro to Allentown Symphony Hall in a concert to celebrate the release of his fourth CD, "Memorias do Brasil," a collection of original choro songs and choro standards by Jacob do Bandolim, Ernesto Nazareth, Hermeto Pascoal, Pixinguinha and Waldir Azevedo.

For the Allentown concert, [Marvin Falcon] looks forward to inviting his dad onstage for a duet. "He traveled [to L.A.] for the West Coast CD release party and nearly stole the show playing "Lady Be Good" on the ukulele," Falcon laughs.

To experience choro where it was born, for the past three years Falcon has traveled to Brazil's annual Festival du Choro. During this year's festival, Falcon was invited to perform live on Brazilian national radio with Brazilian ensemble Epoca de Ouro.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction or distribution is prohibited without permission.