

VICTOR RICE SMOKE

Side A

1. Lou (3:02)
2. Tema (2:35)
3. Turn (3:04)
4. Bermuda Triangle (2:54)
5. Motion Study I (3:27)

Side B

1. Mr Brooks (2:54)
2. Fumaça (3:41)
3. Party Line (3:07)
4. The Dream (2:33)
5. Motion Study II (3:39)

All songs by Victor Rice except:
'Bermuda Triangle', written by Nico Leonard and 'The Dream', written by Marcelin Willems and Ludo Meyers

Nico Leonard - Drums and Percussion
Victor Rice - Bass
Michael Bridoux - Guitar
Sergio Raimundo - Keys
Rolf Langsjoen - Trumpet
Paul Gebhardt - Alto Sax
Tommy Tornado - Tenor Sax
Mr T Bone - Trombone
David Loos - Tenor Sax on
'Lou' and 'Mr Brooks'
David Manghi - Trombone on
'Lou' and 'Mr Brooks'

Produced by Victor Rice
Recorded by Nico Leonard at the Pum Pum Hotel - Charleroi, Belgium
Mixed by Victor Rice at Studio COPAN - São Paulo, Brazil
Mastered by Fernando Sanches at Estúdio El Rocha - São Paulo, Brazil

All songs ©2017
Total Running Time/ASCAP

Cover art: "Bongo & Cuica"
by El Gato Gomez
Layout: Eddie Ocampo

This record is dedicated to the memory of Joseph Dominic Rice (1927-2011)

In 2003, Victor Rice released his second solo album *In America*. The follow up to *At Version City* (1999), it was an important work that reflected the high creativity of New York's vibrant Lower East Side reggae scene and reinforced Rice's creative sensibility for any and all to hear. Although recorded mostly in the United States, the album wasn't finished until after Rice moved to São Paulo, Brazil in 2002. Then an interesting thing happened: we didn't hear from him again. Sure, he was busy over the years mixing, producing, and even playing on the work of others. But Brazil was doing something to his music. What would it sound like when next we heard from him?

Reggae is a music of the world. One can find it everywhere: from New York to Tokyo, the Middle East to the South Sea islands, in China, Africa, and beyond. But what of Brazil? It's there too. Sure, names like Bob Marley, Jimmy Cliff and Toots Hibbert reign supreme in the mainstream, as do a number of reggae nacional groups who offer little more than an offbeat strum under a bubblegum sensibility. Then there's Bahia's samba-reggae, but it drew more from reggae's philosophical teachings about Afro-Brazilian liberation than it did its style. To find the more crucial sounds, one is forced to look more closely into Brazil's underground. In São Luís do Maranhão, the "Reggae Capital of Brazil," a thriving, deep roots sound system culture exists but it's way off the beaten path. Even in larger places like São Paulo, where an ascendant sound system culture sets an important musical tone for most of the country, reggae is strong, but it has traditionally taken a backseat to local styles like MPB, pagode and samba.

Rice started *In America* with a Don Drummond-meets-Wayne Shorter head for reggae. But once in Brazil, the gigs he began getting playing bass in bossa nova trios conditioned his ear. Then, he fell in with São Paulo's "New MPB" movement, where his dub-oriented approach to mix engineering made him something of a darling of the scene and led to a pair of Latin Grammys. He then found himself much more exposed to samba. A music for dancers, samba's an adaptive form that affords those who play it and dance to it an incredible measure of expressive freedom. With roots in Brazil's colonial African slave experience, it is truly the sonic expression of cultural fusion, ripe for experimentation.

Of all the varieties Rice encountered, the one he found resonated with him most was samba-rock. Emerging in São Paulo in the 1960s and popularized by artists like Jorge Ben Jor, Trio Mocotó, and others, the music seemed to tap into a cosmopolitan sensibility that defined the times. It drew elements from foreign musical styles like soul, jazz, and bugalú and set them to a choreography that owed as much to rock and roll as it did to, say, samba de gafieira.

Rice's passion for Jamaican music is well established, but in samba-rock he heard something new to him: a Brazil of another time and place with all its intriguing spirit and fluidity. It reminded him of the great 1960s Jamaican music rocksteady that he'd so long been passionate about. It captivated him in the same way and the parallels he began to notice in the two styles inspired him and fed his creativity. Before long, a creative vision had come together that led here, to *Smoke*.

"This record was about finding a way to fuse two different styles of music and dance from the 1960's, Brazilian samba-rock and Jamaican rocksteady," Rice explained. "The grail for me would be for people to hear samba-rocksteady (SRS), a bridging of styles that would be at once fresh, but with a beat that would be mutually intelligible by dancers from both traditions."

It was a tall order. However, in approaching the job Rice followed the example Béla Bartók set in his work *Mikrokosmos*. A collection of piano études intended for the developing pianist, *Mikrokosmos* begins with short, progressive studies that work through musical and technical problems and concludes with fully realized compositions meant for professional performance. By starting with a series of "simple, 'tonal motion' studies," Rice found he could experiment with architecture, tempo, and swing and begin developing his deceptively challenging samba-rocksteady idea.

This approach yielded "Carregar," by the band Mercúrias in 2012. A stirring track, Rice considers it his first successful foray into the SRS sound. It also led to the diverse set of compositions you hear on *Smoke*. What's fascinating is how clearly the recordings here reveal Rice's creative debt to Bartók, Drummond, Shorter, Jor, and the others who have inspired his creativity over the years. Some of the tracks, like "Tema," "Motion Study I," and the great tribute to Cedric Brooks, "Mr. Brooks," would be familiar to those who primarily know Rice from his work in NYC. Then, there are tracks that expand on this more straightforward idea by carrying it in unexpected directions. "Bermuda," a composition of Nico Leonard, is a ska in waltz time with complex melodic phrasing. "Party Line" is a stripped down reggae instrumental that could easily be confused for a great undiscovered B-side roots scorcher, ripe for dubbing. Then there's "The Dream," a tune Rice borrowed from the Belgian progressive rock band oG Musique's album (*The Woman Who Took*) *A Flying Leap Over The Fence*. It has a deceptive structure that rewards the careful listener.

Finally, there are the tracks that articulate Rice's samba-rocksteady concept. "Lou" builds bugalú into rocksteady to recall the spirit of samba-rock. On "Turn," he's set a pastiche of melodic fragments over a sensual rhythmic base that insinuate melodic cohesion. The result is a track for dancers. "Fumaça" and "Motion Study II" are about melodic and harmonic motion and bring out the music's jazz element. In them, the SRS is found in the way the tunes are phrased and in the small rhythmic touches that he's taken from samba.

"First and foremost my music is about music," Rice proclaims. "What the listener hears should be pleasing to the ear. It won't necessarily be easy on the performer, but it's always about finding a balance. I know I've pulled off something special when the music sounds right to me and nobody notices the complexity that's involved. And as long as people are dancing, I can get away with some challenging stuff."

Making this music happen brought Rice to the Pum Pum Hotel recording studio in Charleroi, Belgium. The home of producer, composer, and drummer Nico Leonard, it opened in 2008 and is now

considered a destination studio for reggae artists in Europe. However, Rice and Leonard's relationship goes back a bit further. The two met in 2003 when Leonard brought Rice to Belgium to produce his band *The Moon Invaders'* eponymous first album. The two found they had a deep artistic resonance and became fast friends. They've been regular collaborators ever since.

Several members of *The Moon Invaders* appear here, including David Loos (tenor sax), David Manghi (trombone), Sergio Raimundo (keyboards), and Mike Bridoux (guitar). What they've brought to the project is not only a superior musicality that can handle the technical challenges Rice throws their way, but also an experienced ensemble approach that adds tremendously to the overall sound.

Also appearing are a pair of musicians from other parts of Europe. Tommy Tornado (tenor sax) hails from the Netherlands and is well known in both jazz and ska circles. "He makes sense of the hardest changes on the record," Rice explained. "He's my wild card, my Stan Getz." Then there's Mr T Bone (trombone) from Italy. Founder of the Jamaican Liberation Orchestra and member of the bands Giuliano Palma & the Bluebeaters and Africa Unite, he's been on the scene since 1992 and has played with all the major reggae groups.

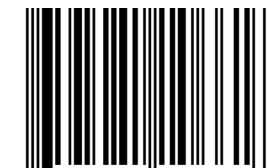
Finally, there are longtime Rice collaborators Paul Gebhardt (alto sax) and Rolf Langsjoen (trumpet). Both have known Rice since the old days, Gebhardt in the Scofflaws and Langsjoen through NYC's Lower East Side Version City scene. Rice and Gebhardt have played together for so long that he confesses he has a hard time hearing horn arrangements without Gebhardt's alto in mind. Theirs is a special bond. There's a similar closeness between Rice and Langsjoen. Rice deeply admires the beautiful, dark, flugelhorn-like tone Langsjoen (who directed the horn sessions for this recording) pulls from his trumpet and for him, and for this music, he was the only choice.

Smoke embraces the cosmopolitanism of the music that inspired it. It's an album that lives in New York, Brazil, Jamaica, and Brussels, but it is of the world. Yes, it's been fifteen years since Rice released his last record, and over that time he's made plenty of music that could have been presented together as an "album." But Brazil, its music, and its people intervened. Out of the experience came samba-rocksteady, a clear creative path that Rice has since followed with pure heart. It's an exciting new direction that's been simmering for years. Finally, the story begins.

- Daniel T. Neely, New York



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