

As if channeling their inner São Paulo snow globe, or meticulously building a miniature Tchaikovsky music box celebrating the holiday spirit, trombonist Natalie Cressman and guitarist Ian Faquini's latest musical feat is their limited edition Christmas EP *Brazilian Nutcracker*. Brevity meets brilliance as this diligent duet focuses their talents on adapting select songs from Tchaikovsky's classic Nutcracker Suite with a vivacious Brazilian flare. All proceeds of the EP will be donated towards providing free colon cancer screenings within underserved communities through the Colorectal Cancer Alliance and Eastern Virginia Medical School's Hopes Clinic in memory of their late friend and musical colleague saxophonist James Casey.

Traditionally interpreted through symphonic orchestra and ballet, Cressman and Faquini pared down these cherished compositions through ingenious arranging utilizing the variety of Brazilian rhythms and musical styles they've mastered throughout their careers. Without painting themselves into any corners, *Brazilian Nutcracker* flows effortlessly, honoring music etched into the soundtracks of our lives by focusing on the bare essentials that make Tchaikovsky's magic so endearing to every generation that entertains it.

Neither sacrilegious or corny, the album's integrity stems from the seamless fit between Latin American and European musical traditions when channeled through the <u>creative prism of gifted artists like Cressman and Faquini</u>. For Faquini their process felt

"more like composing than arranging because we were constantly aiming to get at what we felt was the soul of the music." The results are bite sized gems, the kind of sonic sudoko that binds entertainment to the joyous curiosity of how Tchaikovsky's muse could be so artfully compacted down to just guitar and trombone.

Slowed down to create a delightful contrast of tempo and temperament, *March's* metronome swings from tipsy to caffeinated with both musicians moving from punctuating the meter to surfing Brazil's xote rhythm, a popular dance beat with Central European origins. Majestic and serene, *Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy* opens with the gentle brush strokes of Cressman and Faquini exchanging the melody using such delicate phrasing that the lilt of *ijexá* and *baião* rhythms blends perfectly within the native agility of the song's classical form.

With its Spanish influenced groove, *Chocolate Spanish Dance* uses a syncopated waltz that adds to the already buoyant quality of Tchaikovsky's original framework. At slightly over a minute, the tune's beauty acts as a musical meteor flash. With its wide intervals and tonal range, *Tea (Chinese Dance)* posed unique challenges for Cressman's already impressive chops. Matching the tune's technical acrobatics to a northeastern Brazilian *frevo* style beat, Cressman's use of embouchure and air steals the show.

Not wanting to mess with Tchaikovsky's "perfection," Faquini's arrangement of

Mirlitrons taps into the lyricism of Brazil's toada rhythm with the latter part of the song switching back to the speedier baião before its quick close. Trepak gallops forward with some playful call-and-response, a clever way to represent the essential interplay that an orchestra's woodwinds and strings ordinarily brings to the composition. And suddenly, like watching your favorite arcade game come to an abrupt end, you'll find yourself instinctively searching for more quarters to hear the album again and again.

Great things come in small packages. *Brazilian Nutcracker* builds on that tradition by complimenting the elegance and complexity of Tchaikovsky's Nutcracker Suite with various adaptations that bring new life to music celebrated the world over. Featuring lightning quick songs that don't offer much time or space for personal interpretation, Cressman and Faquini still find remarkably inventive ways to infuse the variety of Brazilian themes that continue to shape their unique creative identity. For Cressman, while that endeavor was certainly difficult, the creative choice was not. "It was our way of being authentic to ourselves rather than just trying to copy the orchestral version of this music. There's no way we could have competed with that." And so thankfully no generic replicas here. Just the next vibrant offering from a dynamic duo that consistently brings the kind of intimacy and imagination to such viscerally approachable music, that it feels like they're playing just for you.