

Portuguese surfaces

BY ARNAUD MAGUET

In early August 2016, our special correspondent Arnaud Maguet went to Lisbon to immerse himself in the recording process for a collaborative French-Portuguese album.

Airport: everyone still looks drunk from last night's partying. I only have a hangover. I'm getting old. Hifiklub check. The whole gang is here: Régis-bass, Nico-guitar, Jean-Loup-guitar-noises, Pascal... hold on, no it's Anthony-electronics, and yours truly.

Flying over the Camargue bayou, eternal snow of the Pyrenees, Iberian badlands. Then the left wing tips as we round the unmistakable opening of the Tagus, cross the river, not exactly at the red bridge but just above it, Frisco style.

On the tarmac, the pachydermatous shadow of the plane in a red haze of sunset. A one-hour time difference.

A huge apartment decorated in international-yuppie beige, everything perfectly placed, designed for what they think is our standard of comfort. We each get a room. One of 'we' must be missing, there's an empty room left.

The free market miracle *Uber alles, Uber alles*, competition *Uber alles*, teleported for the lowest possible price to Bairro Alto, former red-light district.

Drugs for sale on every street corner, but we haven't even dined yet, what savages!

Chilean cocktail: Tequila + lime + egg white + Angostura (*per angusta*), somewhat disappointing three-pepper tacos, strong but not aggressive, oh well. And finally, my first glass of Vinho Verde.

A whisky at the dusty shabby-chic flea market, billiards and mini-skirts at extra charge.

Head to Liverpool's *Euro Dance* galore: flat beers and mirrored ceilings, mirrored walls, ceilings, walls, ceilings, walls.

Another Uber, and another, narrowly in the ballpark, hesitating to go home, music stations we thought long forgotten, too much of a good thing. Fitful sleep.

Coffee, grilled sardines and bubbly water, the morning cocktail of champions.

A long solitary foray in the sun, wandering to get a feel for the city's layout, the hills, invaded by tourists on double-decker buses, in trams, on tricycles, on golf carts and sometimes even on foot.

Street DJ: *Good Vibrations*.

Still looking for old sights of block housing that most likely hasn't survived the relentless gentrification, rather than trying to create new ones. Nostalgia, comrades!

Some field recordings for the machines to chew on at tomorrow's recording session.

Exhausted, cranky from tiredness, return home by metro, feet decimated by my *Hiroshima* Adidas purchased for eight euros a few months back at the souk in Meknes and whose quality I clearly over-estimated. Discovery of the underground temple to consumerism across the street from our place, many floors of shiny things, textiles, cosmetics and digital goods and then the centerpiece: a tower of victuals and flanked by wine. Very well stocked. A drink and then to bed.

Finally out with the gang for vegetable soup at Galeto's, a local institution that's open late and serves

traditional, somewhat bracing dishes at the counter, a kind of Canter's deli minus the California and the kosher. We learn the hard way that Vinho Verde isn't always white, but it is always served cold.

Wake up at the last minute, cheese on toast in the shower and we hit the road.

Direction Namouche Studio, decked out in wood paneling, a grand piano and Hammond organ, Moog Prodigy and Fender Rhodes, Eko Panda 49 and a Wurlitzer, marimba and harpsichord, Bontempi keyboards and a 24-track recorder, Leslie cabin and ribbon microphones what else could you possibly need. All under a fine layer of dust.

The first guests come in from Braga, in the north. Joana-prepared-piano, Luis-modular-synth and Pedro-amplified-drums. They set up.

Paulo S, Triumph Bonneville backfiring and a red-glitter helmet atop a weathered face, starts to film the troops as they warm up. He takes partying seriously, they say. We'll see. He says he liked my film portrait of Alain in the Mojave Desert. I say I'm on strike, no moving pictures, the ball's in his court.

A jungle of cables for running weak and strong currents. If it's all done properly, nothing crosses, tangles, clashes. So no collateral damage to the army of lamps and transistors that will be in action.

Paulo F, The Legendary Tigerman, is at the beach for the time being, it's a dirty job but someone has to do it. He'll join us later for dinner. Will he wear flip-flops tonight?

Dried apples cut into quarters, almonds, dried apricot and still water. The lunch of a hippie hamster. In music, movies and any other entertainment industry requiring specialized, meticulous technical set-ups in order to broadcast later what is happening now, you have to wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait.

The logistics will follow, they say. They most certainly precede. "Its illusionary nature is that of the second degree... That is to say, in the studio the mechanical equipment has penetrated so deeply into reality that its pure aspect freed from the foreign substance of equipment is the result of a special procedure," writes Walter Benjamin in 1936. This guy was way ahead of his time. The quote fits.

Okay, false alarm for lunch, we find a local dive next to the studio, calamari rings and Vinho Verde on the menu! Luis tells me that Sonic Boom lives in Lisbon right now (he lent them his Phoenix synth) and Joana talks to me about her upcoming pilgrimage to Erik Satie's tomb in Normandy. These people have taste.

Everyone is a bit more chill now, it's finally time to record. In a studio that costs fifty euros an hour, it's about time. Monsieur Barclay would not be pleased. First song. Pedro takes his bow to the Piezo cymbals then lets loose on the barrels. Monsieur Barclay would not be pleased.

Joana is surrounded by wood-and-Plexiglas makeshift modernist architecture so that the fallout from her hammers doesn't rain down on all of us. Three E-bows on the piano strings and mallets to lend a helping hand to the engine mechanics. Luis, standing like a switchboard operator, focuses on his patch. Discrete yowls.

Another box around the guitar amp that's dumping noise into everyone else's mics and hit REC, tape rolling.

Quick stop at the apartment to drop off some gear, a few swift ablutions and we're off to see Paulo F. in Bairro Alto.

He tells us it's not drugs they're selling on the street, so the dealers don't have any problems with the constable. Clever.

A beer at the corner bar while waiting for a table to free up at the incredibly packed traditional restaurant. No reservation, but that's not an issue when you're with Paulo.

A burnt chunk of wild boar and a cod-shrimp-egg-breadcrumb stew that looks pre-digested but tastes delicious, white wine selected by Paulo, also delicious.

Fans often stop Paulo in the street to take selfies, trophies for the digital mantelpieces of their so-called social networks. Glory v.2.0, undoubtedly. The term "2.0" is already out, isn't it?

Fancy gin and tonic in an XXL snifter with juniper berries and citrus zest at a bar that was clearly once beautiful and decadent but is presently just a place where tourists go to navel-gaze, British women decked to the nines and Frenchmen in Capri pants, back-row hipsters. DJ Final Scratch playing drum 'n bass covers of late-era Beatles, the third circle of hell for Paulo who is sorry not sorry.

Back at the apartment, a last glass of Vinho Verde while listening to Pino d'Angio on the terrace, bundled in blankets to protect us from the evening wind. Just what we need to sponge off the excess accumulation of inauthenticity, of non-living.

Already tomorrow morning.

Black Sheep Studio, near Sintra, in Lisbon's suburban sprawl. A nice studio with a modernly designed exterior but with vintage gear inside, in a garage at the heart of a working-class neighborhood, 4-storey

building complexes in a zone that seems populated but not inhabited.

Rafael has already arrived from the countryside near Coimbra with a DIY double-oscillator box, wah pedal and delay hooked to his guitar amp. Sounds like a baby fed to a tractor, dolphins being tortured, parts ecstatically squeaking with grace.

I shoot some video for Paulo S who can't come today, instructions, blurs and extremely variable depth of field, which is kind of exotic for me. Let's give it a try. I lie in front of the drums to get the right angle and end up with a partially atomized right eardrum.

Yaw arrives, warms up his mouth on the trumpet, then the bell, mic, delay + reverb, pre-amp, table, speakers, our ears: one, two, three, all systems go! Like a taciturn version of Jac with dreads, but that would be impossible.

Nothing to eat around here, the local *churrasqueira* is closed at this time of day. Pizza is ordered.

Rafael adds a layer using a mic hooked up to a mini amp, feedback and tremolo, precise.

Not the best pizza, far from it, the crust gives you gas. Every country should have good pizza, but Portugal could care less. It can afford a certain bravado.

Calhau! the duo from Porto, Martha and João, is here, voice moaning from prayer position in a digital cathedral, packing analog synths on their belts like Colts. He unleashes the grinding electronics, she makes the night wail like a Lusitanian witch.

The sonic couple stays with us in Lisbon for the night. Galeto again. They talk to me about Ghédalia with GOL, with Reines d'Angleterre, major points. Vinho Verde, this time white (you can easily be fooled...), menu #8 recommended by Paulo S, rock n' roll gastro-fantasma, toast with ground beef sunny-side-up egg and fries, not the Cretan diet, I should've followed the advice I gave to Nico and ordered *Lulas*. Testing a local schnapps, a kind of Cognac, a pretty ceremony from the waiter who attentively heats a special glass with a small pitcher of boiling water before serving the beverage.

One last glass of Vinho Verde at home with our guests and they leave to meet Bernardo, a guy with whom we've scheduled our recording tomorrow. A touch of *Life Aquatic* when they leave, guilty pleasure at hearing Jorge/Bowie while in this place, to each his own exoticism. Then *Endless Eyes* by Alain, I hear he's in L.A. right now, eating oysters, a lavish miracle of digital simultaneity that only the violence of modern life can produce. Tonight I could've lived without knowing. No problem at all.

The next day. I buy some fruit down the street from the house, people eat them apparently, and Uber over to Black Sheep Studio. Bernardo sings experimental neo-Fado and has gone for coffee, lyrics are written and he already did a demo take last night at his house. We listen, it's perfect. The workday could be short. Middle-aged, pale pop-star look, tired voice, hungover, immediately asks if we want a hit. I like this guy already.

Recording the instrumental parts with Guilherm, our sound engineer for the project. Stratocaster, Korg analog guitar synth and a fuzz-Theremin pedal on the other end of the deck, across the glass pane separating musicians from non-musicians – who generally prefer to record in peace at home. André, his assistant, is at the console.

This time, Bernardo explains that it's hash.

A quick run to the corner market with Carlos, the studio owner and drummer for Keep Razors Sharp. Incredible cheese with a hard rind but creamy inside, a variety of plump croquettes, dildo-sized sausages and Super Bock beer. Luxurious survival.

Bernardo downs a therapeutic whisky and dispatches us to a smoky garage-cabaret full of the country's excluded; those left-to-their-own-devices near-fifty types who rest their heads at mom's and let their souls wash up onto the synthesis reef.

Another instrumental recording to which musical guests currently on vacation will later contribute. Maybe. A little tempo trouble, I personally liked the super slow version, the sticky sauna corrugated dive-bar on the outskirts of the Laurisilva of Madeira version. Any faster would be suicide.

Across from Galeto, at the Versailles restaurant, the feel of an old brewery, reminiscent of Gambrinus in Naples, a minimalist menu, crab-shrimp risotto to die for, quality Vinho Verde and local grappa to match. Bernardo joins us, we announce that we'd like him to sing on all the songs on the album, he doesn't refuse. My Canon crashes to the ground in our excitement to immortalize the moment, warped lens that now refuses to click into the body, the final shot is blurry on the edges, à la *Bringing it All Back Home*. We'll need to make a pit stop. Concentrate on writing, it's just as good. There's no *pasteis de nata* without breaking some eggs, as they say here – at least six per piece, from the look of things

A night kiosk in the middle of a park somewhere, rum, local cherry schnapps, Bernardo was a roadie for Suicide, not the worst gig. He wanted to see shows for free, he says. A small joint in the wind amidst the giant magnolia undulating in the Lisbonian darkness.

Staggering home, a mega-cannelloni on the long and dusty hallway rug, sand in my teeth, smack on the ass, red, collapsing into a bed freshly made by the cleaning lady (or man), curtain. I hope you will never see the photos.

Ouch.

I get dressed in the shower to save time, studio, Paulo S and Rui are waiting for us. Rui shops around in Black Sheep's bin of pedals and amps to prep his intervention.

Carlos says that high doses of Portuguese grappa can have a Kool-Aid Acid effect. That's cool. He sets up his drums, various objects placed on the skins to *bizarrrify* the thing.

Paulo S warns us that he's not a very technical drummer and that it will be loud and direct, a flaw we can forgive.

Lunch at the local *churrasqueira*, flame-broiled chicken and mackerel, beer and homemade pastries bursting with calories, the waiter looks like he's ready to kill us, everyone finishes their plate. Simple, good and prices that beat all the competition. Rui takes a grappa, the best in all of Portugal he claims, politely declined. That's how it is.

Paulo S brings Rui back in his bronze 80s vintage Mercedes. We wait for Paulo F who's supposed to come by with Afonso in the late afternoon.

The Legendary Tigerman trio is going to adopt another name for this project. They're going to pretend like they make experimental music. I suggest The Unfamous Panther Boys. Me, I pretend like I'm cool.

Paulo S sits at the drums and starts abusing the barrels, indeed, quite seriously.

Paulo F arrives, screaming something in Portuguese that everyone finds hilarious. We give a polite chuckle. Elegant as usual. Aviator glasses, superb glittering blue Welson and a little vintage amp in a metal case. The Tigerman is in the house.

João-saxophone-baritone arrives, he's going to play an overdub.

A round so everyone can find their cues.

Afonso, singer for Keep Razors Sharp and Sean Riley & the Slowriders arrives, naturally chill, a pop star.

In the garage, Paulo F takes a portrait of Carlos on his Polaroid Automatic 250, ceremonial friction between his hands before removing the protective film. Again, again. Not bad.

Everyone goes back to work, it's the last take where everyone's together, then we'll start the overdubs.

Afonso re-reads some hand-written notes scratched on a piece of paper, mumbling the lyrics he's about to sing.

Hop to the supermarket to repatriate some beers and a few bottles of Vinho Verde.

Afonso is at the mic, enclosed in a cabin with anti-reverb walls. Infinite melancholy and sadness, a close friend passed away not long ago, took a one-way trip off the Vasco de Gama bridge. These words are for him.

João finds a spot in the cabin, discrete and deep sax to back up Afonso's voice, taking over where the latter leaves off. Free, shrill violence that pierces you harder than a spinal tap. I love it.

So much that we decide for more sax. João is discussing with Pedro, the drummer from the first day.

The magic of technology defeating time and space, not Nat King Cole duetting with his daughter or Elvis live in 2008, but close enough.

Return to the apartment, ablutions, Pino d'Angio, Sleaford Mods, Wu-Tang Clan, Norman Greenbaum, back to Galeto and then we head to the best party in Lisbon, *Baile Tropicante*, Pedro, DJ star of Madeira, friend of the Paulos. We meet the whole team over there for a beautiful finale, which of course involves eye candy and dimmed lights. Aren't you wearing a bit too much makeup? No.

Two days later.

Well, I won't lie. The withdrawal from this euphoric kingdom is long and deep. Rewind.

Galeto, where it all started. Grilled calamari, someone spills Vinho Verde on me, naked from the waist up so I can take off my drenched undershirt, it's on my head with the empty bottle held like a trophy in my hand in an attempt to reenact, with the subtlety and elegance of someone whose BAC has tipped the scale, the Yemen Olympic team (coolest country in the world) arriving at the stadium in Rio.

Simultaneous livecast on the screens above our heads. Glory *in absentia*.

Shirt-flag drying from the window of our Uber, headed to the center. We come in peace. I abandon the stinking shirt on the rails of the bar, which was beautiful and decadent.

Colossal line at the club, and on the guest list for the Tiger. Beam me in, Paulo!

From then on, things get more confused, vodka and beer in considerable quantity, wild dancing

surrounded by the whole tribe, Paulo F, the true gentleman, undulates on stage next to the DJ, gin-and-tonic the size of an aquarium in hand, remarkable selection of Tropicalia, Electro Cumbia and Latin Soul. More, more, more.

Sunrise over the Tagus, a pontoon bobbles in the water, Étienne Daho (“Tombé pour la France”) and another dose of Pino d’Angio (who could have enough?), fish market, shells and crustaceans, borrowed jet-skis to go to a magnificent beach an hour south of Lisbon, V-formation French-military-style, a few tricks to impress the seagulls above and the crabs below, tide heading out, perfect little waves, swimming, sun, Caipirinha, beer. Then it’s time for an aperitif, Vinho Verde and local tapas, almost the whole team for the album is there: Paulo F and S, Guilherm, Diana, Lara, Afonso. Martha and João too, it so happens, we thought they went back to Porto. One of their friends asks if I’m the singer from Bader Motor. Flattered then mischievously surprised. It’s Pedro, the programmer of a festival we played at a few years ago, I didn’t recognize him. Big hugs. Final bottles of Vinho Verde on the beach to watch the sunset and then drive back to Lisbon. Our last beers on a noisy, popular square, last exchange of saucy anecdotes about past tours. The kids are off to the Sabotage party where our friend Tiago is mixing. I go back to the apartment, at the end of my rope. I think that’s all, I’m sure I’ve forgotten something, but since I’ve also added things, it all comes out even.

If my calculations are correct, we’re back at the present.

Seventh floor, lunch in one of the many cafeterias in the temple of consumerism. A typical dish highly recommended: toast, ham, sausage, tomato, fried egg and melted cheese covered in a thick, reddish sauce. Like eating road kill from a few hours earlier, some animal that managed to crawl along the curb but whose bodily fluids were too mixed up to hope for a quick, full and definitive recovery. Lymph, blood and urine rarely fare well when out too long in the sun.

A few tins of sardines purchased in the city, gifts with taste, the sign of a true gentleman for whom friendship is no trifling matter.

Aperitif with The Doctor, fresh from Marseille. He makes it a point of honor to have one last point for this Portuguese mission. A final point. Period.

Panoramic view of the Rio and San Francisco, sprayed by a liquid I hope is water, iced tea (it happens), beer. Paulo F and Afonso join us. Lacoste polo shirt contest with The Doctor.

Lara, flight attendant, has taken off for Paris, work. Diana and Paulo S, lovers, have left for Sicily, vacation.

Paulo F has, with some difficulty, found a restaurant where everyone can fit, or almost. Indian, oh well. The waltz of the bottles. Paulo F makes a selection, no Vinho Verde, it hurts. Spicy food. Our DJ friends join the assembly. Clumsiness and the roach Bernardo wanted to pass me ends up in my glass. We get a bottle on the house, a digestif, very kind but too heavy. Last round in streamlined company at a kiosk, return to the panoramic view, Frisco and Rio. Brief diversion to find those spots closed on Sunday evening in August, two-thousand-sixteen. Back at the apartment, packing bags but no, we’ll see to it tomorrow, dump the contents into a suitcase. All the boys agree that it all fits, really.

Ouch, ouch... ouch!

Come on, come on, just dump it all in there, if you sit on it, it will close. Faster faster, pile into a sporty Uber and head to the airport. We do a check: Nico, Jean-Loup, Antho, me... where’s Régis? Shit, we’ve lost Régis! He has ‘fallen for France’ (I knew we shouldn’t have listened to Etienne Daho) on the battlefield. His ashes will be strewn into the pool of a luxury hotel in Porto. One minute of silence.

Okay, that’s enough.

In the plane, everyone is hungover from one of last night’s parties. Me, I’m still a bit drunk. And in top shape.

Translation by Maya Dalinsky