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He plays the sounds of a different Brazil.

## Perelman: Brazilian yes, mellow hardly

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**S**ome Brazilian music sounds ready made for hotel lounges - whispering bossa novas, tepid jazz fusion tunes, canned lambadas. Just heat and serve. Then there's saxophonist Ivo Perelman.

Because he speaks of a different Brazil - poor, violent, rife with injustice, rooted in Africa as much as in Europe - Perelman plays a music of brutal beauty.

The tone is not soothing.

Perelman has a raw, muscular sound. He favors direct, nursery-rhyme melodies, simple forms and plain harmonies, and as he launches into another improvisation, the music takes on a breathtaking urgency tempered only by moments of unexpected tenderness. He draws lush, broad lines, then slashes and pokes at them with cries, honks and two-octave leaps. It's a hardearned lyricism that evokes the early days of Argentine Gato Barbieri.

When people hear he is a Brazilian jazz player, "they definitely expect something mellow," said Perelman in a phone interview from his home in New York. "Well, I studied the bebop guys, like everybody else. I tried to learn the language of mainstream jazz. I went to Berklee, I tried to play like everybody else -

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and I failed. For a long time I thought there was something wrong with me. But here and there there would be people who would give me insights and support me. I just kept doing it and now the albums have been a success and, believe it or not, I'm touring."

In fact, Perelman will appear at Nightstage, Cambridge, Sunday at 8:30 and 10:30 p.m. He leads a strong band featuring JoAnne Brackeen on piano; Fred Hopkins, bass; Barry Altschul, drums; and Mor Thiam, percussion. The show opens a week of performances highlighting jazz at the clubs in Boston. This year, each night the Globe Jazz Festival showcases a club that regularly presents jazz.

Perelman was born in Sao Paulo in 1961. His mother, a pianist and music teacher, encouraged his musical inclinations. He started studying classical guitar at 7, then cello, trombone and piano.

"I was just trying to find an instrument I could feel one with," explained Perelman. "Then one day I found the tenor, after having played the clarinet and the alto a bit. I put it in my mouth and that was it. That was not that long ago. I was 19, and I started to study seriously when I was 20."

He also studied architecture for two years. "But at the time I was playing clarinet at a night club with a Dixieland band," he recalled, "and was listening to clarinetists like Albert Nicholas and Jimmie Noonan,

musicians from that period, and I decided to study seriously. So I dropped everything and went up to Boston, to Berklee."

But after two years he was on the move again, living in Montreal for a year ("I played bossa nova on the guitar"), then attending the Dick Grove School in Los Angeles, moving briefly to Italy ("I played bebop there"), then France, England and back to Los Angeles.

He recorded his first album, simply titled "Ivo" (K2B2), in 1989. It featured a remarkable ensemble, especially considering Perelman was an unknown. It featured drummer Peter Erskine, bassists John Patitucci and Buell Neidlinger and fellow Brazilians Airto and Flora Purim. His second release, the powerful "Children of Ibeji" (enja), showcased Perelman with artists such as Don Pullen, Paul Bley and Andrew Cyrille.

Because of his sound and approach, many reviewers raised comparisons with Pharoah Sanders and, especially, fiery avant-gardist Albert Ayler.

"The more I talk about, the more people say I imitate him, so I don't know..." he said, his voice trailing off. "I knew [Albert Ayler] existed but I never really heard him until after I started to see the reviews. I mean, I knew who he was and the kind of music he played, but I never owned a record of his because I thought it was too far out."

Many probably consider now Perelman a far-out avant-gardist, and the irony doesn't escape him. He pauses and then, as if shrugging it all off, he adds:

"I just try to make beauty. What I think is beauty. I try to bring my life to a language and then try to play that story. That's all I think.