

## Luisa Maita

### In Her Own Words - The Interview

**What is your birthday and year?**

April 27, 1982

**Where were you born?**

São Paulo, Brazil, in a neighborhood called Bela Vista, affectionately nicknamed Bexiga.

**What is your full name?**

Luísa Taubkin Maita. My father's idea to call me Luísa came from a Tom Jobim song that he loved very much: "Ana Luísa". My three sisters and I are all named after Tom Jobim songs. With regard to my family names: Taubkin is European Jewish and Maita is Syrian Muslim. I find it very interesting that my parents come from families with such different cultural backgrounds. That's very Brazilian, even more so because they got together through and for music.

**Where did you grow up?**

In a couple of places. I was born in Bexiga (it means bladder or balloon, in English) and even though I soon moved away, I was a regular in the neighborhood during my entire childhood and adolescence. That's where my father's family is from. My grandparents and my uncles had a restaurant and a parking lot on Santo Antônio Street. This place is very much a part of me. It's a working class area full of Italians, Arabs, blacks and migrants from the northeast of Brazil. It's famous for its personality, culture, food and music. It's where Vai-Vai, São Paulo's most traditional samba school, is based. This samba school was my most important musical reference, after my family.

In the 1980's, the clubs and bars in Bexiga were the main spots for music in São Paulo. After peaking in the 80's, came a decline in the 90's, and the neighborhood became simple and poor, a place where migrants from the northeast and the state of Minas Gerais first come to when they are looking for jobs in São Paulo. So, during my childhood and adolescence, I lived with "various peoples" and various aspects of different cultures.

As my parents wanted a more peaceful place to raise their kids, they soon moved to a small ranch on the southernmost side of São Paulo. It was a very beautiful place, an oasis. When we would leave the ranch, we'd be in the outskirts of the city, with all of its typical features: evangelical churches, dirt roads, public schools, street markets, densely populated neighborhoods. The rich atmosphere of the outskirts of São Paulo was very much a part of my life at that time. So until I was 11, I had really close contact with the outskirts of São Paulo and its culture.

My father had a lot of musician friends who liked him a lot. He was very good at uniting people. They'd visit him, fall in love with the ranch, and then they'd move in. Soon the place was filled with my father's friends, among them some great musicians like Sizão Machado, Lea Freire, Guilherme Vergueiro, Pete Wooley, Mozar Terra, Fernando Falcão. As well as this, on weekends, the ranch was a meeting place for the friends of the people who lived there. And that was what my childhood was like: a universe of music and creativity, and people of great personality. That's my most precious musical treasure.

Another universe that's very important to me is my mother's Jewish family. My grandfather was a religious man; he used to organize Jewish celebrations. My mother's entire family lived in Jardim Europa, where my mother was born, one of the richest, most elegant neighborhoods in São Paulo. I went to upper-class Jewish schools until I was 13. And that experience marked me too.

When I was 15 my mother, who had already separated from my father, married a farmer and we moved to his farm in the state of Minas Gerais. There I developed a relationship with nature and a completely different lifestyle. That experience was important for my music too. I came back to São Paulo at 17 and moved to Higienópolis, where I still live today.

I feel that I've had opposite experiences: with the upper class and with the working class; in the most urban of cities and on a farm; and I come from a family with an extremely diverse background, ethnically and socially.

**What was your childhood like?**

Looking back today, I guess I had a rich, unique, creative childhood, with a lot of references from people of different backgrounds and from different places. This made a strong impression on me. I think that's interesting because somehow I still carry all this with me today.

**What did you parents do for a living?**

My mother Myriam Taubkin has had a musical production company for the last 30 years. It's called Projeto Memória Brasileira ([www.projeto memoriabrasileira.com.br](http://www.projeto memoriabrasileira.com.br)). The company records, in audio and video, Brazil's most important instrumental musicians and



promotes shows bringing together these musicians focusing on one instrument at a time. My mother frequently brings musicians from distant places to play in São Paulo. Some of these shows impressed me deeply and exposed me to phenomenal content. I've attended these events all my life, since 1985.

My deceased father, Amado Maita, owned a parking lot in Bexiga. He spent most of his time in the parking lot office building, a very peculiar place. That's where he used to play the guitar, write songs, and receive his friends. That was his place, his kingdom, and he ended up becoming a popular and well-liked figure in Bexiga. He had a lot of personality and was a reference in the neighborhood. He was also a singer-songwriter who, in 1971, at 21, released an album that today is like the Holy Grail for Japanese and European collectors. From 1974/75 on he began to play the drums. He was a drummer for 20 years and played with the best musicians of São Paulo nightlife. His music had a lot of swing, and his guitar and drum playing was strongly influenced by the samba rhythm, something he learned from his experience with samba schools.

#### **Do you have brothers and sisters?**

I have 3 sisters and 2 brothers.

#### **Was music part of your life growing up?**

For sure. My main references come from that period of my life. Samba has always been part of my life because of my father and Bexiga, and I was also surrounded by other musical styles because of the rest of my family and my father's friends, many of whom have never recorded their music to this day.

My family is very musical; many of my relatives work with music. My main influences come straight from my family: my father left me the samba school spirit and the personality of that rhythm; my uncle Daniel Taubkin is a great singer/songwriter whose style was a model to me because his music is a mixture of lot of different influences; my aunt Rita Figueiredo influenced me very much with her intense and sensual singing style. And there was also Fernando Falcão, who was a kind of godfather to me. He was a northeastern genius whose music influenced artists like Nana Vasconcelos and Alceu Valença. The experience I had with him was really enriching.

#### **How did you first start playing music?**

I sang a lot in my childhood. My father liked to play for us, he loved the fact that my sister Teresa and I could sing in tune, and I've been singing all his songs and samba and bossa nova standards since I was very little. We recorded advertising jingles professionally when we were seven, eight. Among them was the jingle for Lula's presidential campaign in 1989. My sister and I recorded it, and it was played on the radio all the time. I even sang at one of Lula's campaign rallies for 30,000 people at Praça da Sé in São Paulo when I was seven.

#### **What were some of your early musical influences?**

I love African-American music, the personality and energy of western black music. I see that in samba and I'd love to incorporate it in my music. The dance, the instruments, the tunes, the percussion, the body language, everything in samba influenced me a lot. I also love the pop music that has this same African-American energy, but in a different way. Music by Michael Jackson, Prince, Steve Wonder and others. I love bossa nova, its silence, its sensuality, its vocal expression and esthetics. It has a certain aura of peace that's very clear in my music.

#### **What kind of music did you listen to growing up?**

My parents listened mostly to samba, bossa nova and jazz: João Gilberto, Tom Jobim, Nana Caymmi, Vinicius de Moraes, Milton Nascimento, Edu Lobo, Baden Powell. With my father, I listened to the jazz albums that ended up being very important for me. One of them was Billie Holiday's *Lady in Satin*. When he first played it for me I remember my father saying, "Luísa, you're about to hear the world's most beautiful voice". That was Billie's last album and I listened to it a lot when I was 15. It's one my strongest references in terms of vocal expression together with Sade, whom I also listened to all my life. Other albums that I listened to a lot: Shirley Horn's *Here's to Life*; Betty Carter & Ray Charles and Chet Baker.

Because of my schoolmates, I began to listen to the music that played on the radio. I also loved to go out to dance. So I heard a lot of music from the 80s and 90s, Brazilian music and foreign music: Michael Jackson, Prince, a lot of R&B and disco.

#### **Did you have a music teacher?**

In the beginning, I studied with Monica Montenegro for three years and now I take lessons with singer/voice coach Ana Luiza. My most important teacher was a dance teacher, José Maria Carvalho. I studied with him for five years and I learned a lot about art and stage performance. We used to discuss the purpose of art, esthetics, expression. And I had several music theory teachers. I took many different courses.

#### **Where did you go to school?**

I went to many schools: seven years at traditional Jewish schools - IL Peretz and Renascença. I also went to other private schools and public schools: Magno, Interlagos, Mackenzie, São Domingos, all in São Paulo.



**Is there any particular event or events in your life that made a particular impression on you or influenced your music?**

Every samba school that I had contact with, every samba singer or musician I had contact with... That never fails to amaze me. It's the root of everything.

In 1996, my mother produced Lenine's first gigs in São Paulo, the show for the *Olho de Peixe* album, and I was really impressed. His performance had its own brilliance... the songs... everything in the show impressed me a lot.

**What made you decide to go into music as a profession?**

At 16, I began to work for my uncle Benjamim Taubkin's label. I went to all the gigs and sold CDs. There I met producer/musician Morris Picciotto (known today as Dr. Morris). At the time he worked as a producer. I started taking guitar lessons with him. As I also sang, we began to play in bars and that was a very good experience. Then Daniel Taubkin invited me to sing with him. He had just finished producing a CD with Roy Cicalla and his band was amazing. I already knew the whole repertoire: songs in English that talked about Brazil. I was hooked and I couldn't stop. I was 17, 18, the age when everyone was taking their college entrance exams. For some time I did both, prepare for the exams and continue my career in music, until finally I decided to stick to music.

**When and where did you start playing music professionally?**

I began to sing with Morris Picciotto in bars in São Paulo in 1999, voice and guitar. We sang a lot of Brazilian music. We sang together until we formed my most important band: Urbanda. We released an album in 2003; it featured my work as a singer and songwriter. At the same time I began to sing with Daniel Taubkin in different places. I was also recording advertising jingles, I sang at weddings, I sang in choirs and did backing vocals for Jair Rodrigues on albums and in shows. All that experience brought me much valuable knowledge of Brazilian music.

**What has been the most difficult experience in your life and why? What did you learn from it?**

I think there are many difficulties, mainly at the beginning, when you don't have practice, structure, knowledge. Starting my career as a singer was hard. Some gigs weren't good; I felt a natural insecurity until I found my own artistic vein.

In 2004, I had already been a member of Urbanda for three years. The band's career was growing; our music was getting wider recognition. But I wasn't happy. I felt the band didn't represent the sound that I wanted, my sound. And I decided to leave. Dr. Morris, who was with the band too, decided to do the same and the band broke up. It was a tough decision to me, but I decided to go solo.

With nothing but my dreams and my courage, I assembled a new band and began to look for interesting places to sing. I wanted to sing songs by the songwriters that were part of my life and whose songs hadn't yet been released - Amado Maita, Fernando Falcão, Fernando (Tom) Costa, Geraldo Espíndola - as well as my first songs and Rodrigo Campos's songs. I put on a series of six gigs. They were really cool, but still not quite what I had in mind. I wasn't happy yet.

At this point, in early 2005, I wasn't certain if I should go on singing, if that was my thing or not. I went through weeks and weeks of questioning and doubt. It was then that I decided to stop, try to answer these questions, and begin to develop my own new approach. It took a lot of courage to understand what was going on and where I wanted to go. I began to write new songs, songs that expressed my feelings, what I wanted to say, to whom I wanted to say it—a new sound, with my personality, with my look.

Recording the album was also a long process. Without resources, I approached the producer Lepetit, who was really enthusiastic about the songs and became my partner on the album. We used his studio's vacant hours, Rodrigo, Paulo and I. We'd record a song. If we didn't like the result, we'd record it again. It took us two years to produce the result we wanted. That was an important learning process, not to be satisfied with something that doesn't really express what I wanted to say through my art. That's why this album is so precious to me. It really represents my thoughts about music, and the struggle to find this expression.

**Describe your life today? What is a typical day for you?**

It depends. I don't have a fixed routine. But right now, I usually get up at 8AM. I have singing and body expression lessons in the morning. I dedicate the afternoons to the more objective, less artistic side of my work. Then come meetings, recordings and rehearsals. I always try to schedule these activities for the late afternoon/evening. When I have a gig I dedicate my entire day, and the previous week, to the show. I often go to bars and shows with friends in the evening. I try to study in the morning as a routine. On weekends I go to samba schools and clubs to dance. I also spend time with family and friends.

**Do you have any religious, spiritual or political beliefs that are important to you?**

My family is Catholic, Muslim and Jewish. I've had contact with all these religions and they're part of my life. As a teenager, influenced by my uncle Benjamim Taubkin, I began to read a lot about eastern philosophies and that was very important to me. Today I believe in self-knowledge as a guide. I've been reading Jung and the individuation theory.

**Have you recorded any other songs or albums before this one? If so, what and when?**

*Coralusp, Canções Seculares*: When I was around 18, I sang in the Renaissance music choir at the University of São Paulo for two years and we recorded a live album of our repertoire in a studio. There were 16 members in the choir. I was a soprano. The repertoire featured songs in several languages: French, Italian, Spanish and English.

*Urbanda*: This album was recorded in 2003/2004. Urbanda had five members: Morris Picciotto - guitar, Rodrigo Campos - guitar, Luísa Maita - vocals, Marcos Paiva - bass, Douglas Alonso - drums. They were all musicians, composers, arrangers and producers. I learned a lot with this band.

We started playing together in 2001. We rehearsed a lot to create a repertoire for shows and soon we were doing gigs. We played that repertoire for three years. We used to rehearse two or three times a week and that, together with the time spent performing, allowed me to develop my singing skills a lot. In 2003 we decided to record an acoustic album. We just wanted to record what we did live, and as we had it all very well rehearsed, we recorded our whole repertoire live in a studio.

Rodrigo Campos, *São Mateus não é um Lugar Assim Tão Longe*: this album was recorded in 2008. Rodrigo and I have worked together since Urbanda and he still is my main musical partner. This album focuses on Rodrigo's work as a songwriter. It was produced by Beto Villares and Antonio Pinto. As I've always sung songs by Rodrigo, I ended up recording four tracks.

*Daniel Taubkin*: I did vocals for Daniel's band on many of his albums. We began to write songs together a short time ago and on his latest CD, *Sertão Negro* (2009), I sang a song we wrote together, "Folia". I also did vocals for some other tracks.

*Geração SP*: This album, produced by Dani Barra, aimed at getting São Paulo's new generation of musicians together. I participated in two tracks "In Your Language," produced by Dani Barra and "Neblina," produced by Gustavo Ruiz. During the recording, I had the chance to work with several musicians and producers of my generation.

*Carlos Nuñez*: The work began with Spanish musician Carlos Nuñez through Beto Villares. We were going to compose and record three songs for Carlos's new album about Brazilian music. During the process, Carlos and Beto had to accept other jobs and I ended up singing only one track, "Coração Brasileiro," a Milton Nascimento song. The track was recorded in Rio de Janeiro and the album was produced by Mario Caldato and Alê Siqueira.

#### **What other musicians have you performed or recorded with?**

I participated in shows with artists of my generation like Max de Castro, Mariana Aydar, Ricardo Teté and Danilo Moraes, Trio Improvisado, Ricardo Herz, Leo Cavalcanti, among others.

#### **What are some highlights of your career?**

Virginia Rosa recording two of my sambas in 2006. The songs stood out on her album and that encouraged me to keep writing songs. Mariana Aydar's second album (2009) featured one of my songs called "Beleza", which was co-written by Rodrigo Campos. I sang on four songs on Rodrigo's album as well. In 2009, I was invited to sing in two promotional videos for the successful bid for Rio to host the 2016 Olympic Games. The videos were directed by Fernando Meirelles, one of Brazil's most famous filmmakers who directed *City of God*. These videos were shown all over the world. Because of these special participations, I have gotten a lot of media coverage in Brazil before even releasing my own first solo album.

#### **Is there a theme to this album that connects the songs?**

The album travels through themes that encourage Brazilians to wake up to a new life: dreams - passion; labor - the struggle and peace - interior acceptance. All of the tracks have something to do with these themes and they were linked conceptually. Yes, the album is inspired by the struggle of the Brazilian people for life. Many Brazilians come from non-functional families and have a hard time making their dreams come true.

#### **When and where did you record this album?**

The first song I recorded was "Maria e Moleque" in 2005, before I had even decided to make an album. The idea was just to make a video clip of this song. In 2006, I recorded a demo of "Maria e Moleque", "Ai Vem Ele", "Alento" and "Alívio". These songs were recorded at the Wah-Wah Studio, Lepetit's old studio (some time ago the studio was jointly owned by Lepetit and Suba). In May 2007, we recorded the other songs at Outra Margem, Lepetit's new studio, and in 2008 we finished the recordings. We mixed the album in April at YB Studio with Gustavo Lenza, and in November, we did the mastering at the Classic Master Studio with Carlos Freitas.

#### **Can you describe the recording process of this album?**

I wrote the music and lyrics and then passed them on to Rodrigo to define the rhythm, harmony and guitar arrangement. First we recorded voice and guitar. Then Paulo added all the other elements: bass, drums and electronic sounds. After Paulo defined the structure, we listened to it, discussed the details and after coming to an agreement, we'd close the production.



**How would you describe the album to someone that hasn't heard it before?**

It's a Brazilian music album with a pop, electronic music sonority, but it's still very acoustic because it features samba and Brazilian musical instruments. Its inspiration comes from the urban life of São Paulo, its ghettos and its people. The lyrics and the aura of the album focus on the peculiarities of Brazilian daily life, culture and human condition. In fact, the inspiration for the record comes from the conditions of life of the Brazilian people. That really inspires, fascinates, interests and moves me. And I think that the album transmits these feelings. I'd love to help these people with my music. I'd like them to listen to it and see themselves. That's my dream.

**What do you think sets you apart from other musicians in your country?**

In the Brazilian context, what makes my work different is the fact that it's pop without losing its depth. It's accessible, but it still transmits an interesting message. I tried to make an essentially popular album, opening a channel to communicate with people, trying to serve people. I think my music has this kind of coherence and that makes it different. On the other side, besides the names I mentioned earlier, I identify with my generation of singers, songwriters and musicians from São Paulo, people like Curumin, Beto Villares, Céu, Mariana Ayard, Antonio Pinto, Rodrigo Campos. We deal with the same music and life issues. I also identify with Brazilian pop music artists like Seu Jorge, Cássia Eller, Marcelo D2, with their performance and commitment to the audience.

**What are your plans or goals for the future?**

To build a coherent and integrated career. Think of the long term, to find my space in the market with my own light. I'd like to be meaningful for a large audience and, at the same time, be creative and interesting.

