

Forro in the Dark (NY/Brazil)

Biography (2009)

For those who don't already know, *fórró* is the hip-swiveling, dancefloor-filling, rural party music of Brazil's northeastern states. And **Forro in the Dark** is the collective of four New York-based Brazilian expats – Mauro Refosco (*zabumba* drum and vocals) Davi Vieira (percussion and vocals) Guilherme Monteiro (guitar and vocals) and Jorge Continentino (*pifano* flute, sax and vocals) – who are updating this traditional sound for the 21st century.

"In Brazil, *fórró* literally means party," says Mauro. "It's a gathering, a good time. The objective is to make people dance." Which is exactly what **Forro in the Dark** have been doing since 2005 at their weekly residence at East Village nightspot Nublu, where their signature blend of down home *fórró* and urban cool have made them one of the city's must-see buzz bands.

The skeleton of the band's sound is the syncopated rhythms of *fórró*, - *xote*, *baião* and *arrasta-pé* - which are familiar to Brazilians as the toe-tapping backdrop to a long workday, a folk party in the Northeast, and the sound spilling out from dance halls in the wee hours. The upbeat tunes contrast with the lyrics' serious themes: *Fórró* songs romanticize the harsh and unforgiving *sertão* of Brazil's northeast, giving voice to the migrant's melancholy lament and the country bandit's ballad.

"*Fórró* is so much a part of Brazilian life that you hear it everywhere growing up, in soap operas, on TV, everywhere," says Jorge. "It's all over the country, not just the Northeast It doesn't matter where you're from. If you're Brazilian, then you know about *fórró*."

Forro in the Dark pays homage to this playful and emotional genre's rich history, while also making party music for today's global village. They update the traditional accordion, *zabumba*, and triangle instrumentation popularized by the great *fórró* artists like **Luiz Gonzaga** and **Jackson do Pandeiro**. Abandoning the accordion, they've added Jorge's *pifano*, a wooden flute from the Northeast of Brazil, Guilherme's twangy guitar, and Davi's *timbau*, a Bahian drum. The new additions float between the beat of Mauro's *zabumba*, a drum with both snare and bass pitches, and the tweet of Davi's triangle.



"All the traditional elements of *farró* are there. We respect the tradition," explains Guilherme, "but that's just the starting point. We're open to all styles. *Farró* creates the space, but our imaginations and our creativity are our only limit." "Our instruments, our way of writing songs is very connected to those roots," Mauro adds. "But our approach to playing and our attitude and energy comes from rock and roll. Living in New York helped us break the rules a little. We like to play loud."

The result is a musically omnivorous signature sound that grafts dub, indie rock, funk, jazz and even country & western swing onto *farró's* sturdy roots. It's a sexy, globalized groove that's entirely their own – and which has been seducing New Yorkers onto the dance floor for years now.

The seed of the band was born at a party for Mauro's birthday at Nublu, a club in New York's East Village, where he invited some friends to jam, *farró*-style. They were such a hit that they started a weekly residency. The band's current cast solidified for 2006's *Bonfires of Sao Joao*, an addictive exploration of the *farró* form with downtown New York influences, featuring **David Byrne**, **Bebel Gilberto**, and **Miho Hatori** as guest vocalists. **Forro in the Dark** spent 2007 touring throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, and Latin America in support of *Bonfires*, spreading their good vibes over the globe. They garnered critical acclaim for their innovative sound, and new audiences fell in love with their energetic live shows. On that period they still found time to record the song "City Of Immigrants" on Steve Earl's Grammy-winning album *Washington Square Serenade*. Only two months after returning to New York, they were ready to go back into the studio for 2008's acclaimed *Dia de Roda* EP. 2009 promises even wider horizons, with more touring in Europe and the Americas, and the release of their new, full-length LP *Light A Candle*.

Forro in the Dark is **Mauro Refosco** on Zabumba and Vocals; **Davi Vieira** on Percussion and Vocals; **Guilherme Monteiro** on Guitar and Vocals; and **Jorge Continentino** on Pifano, Baritone Sax and Vocals. On tour, they are joined by a bass player.

Release Info "Light a Candle" (2009)

Forro in the Dark's newest release, *Light A Candle* is the group's first full-length release since 2006's acclaimed *Bonfires of São João*. Recorded in a marathon, six-day session at New York City's Flux studios with production by Fab, the album contains 13 all-new tracks and a reprise of Forró favorite "Nonsensical" from their 2008 EP *Dia de Roda*.

Taking inspiration from a Neil Young song, Guilherme explains how *Light A Candle's* title track is about the power of hope and faith in dark times. "Coming from a Catholic country like Brazil," he explains, "lighting a candle has a spiritual connotation – and not just in Catholicism, but in Candomblé and other Brazilian spiritual practices, too, the idea of illuminating a space is very powerful. For me it's about using music to transform the darkness of the times we just came out of into something positive."



Old friends and fellow Nublu alumnae drop by to lend their voices to *Light A Candle*, too. Sabina Sciubba of **Brazilian Girls** graces "Silence Is Golden" with a sultry and knowing performance, while Forró's own Guilherme Monteiro, sings the lead on "Better Than You," and singer-songwriter Jesse Harris voices the rueful hangover ballad "Just Like Any Other Night". But their tenure in NYC hasn't erased Forró In the Dark's Brazilian roots, as covers of *forró* classics "Saudades de Manezinho Araujo" by Teo Azevedo and "Forró de Dois Amigos" by Edmilson do Pífano attest.

Also on the trad side is the rollicking "Bandinha," built around *forró's* fast-paced *arrasta-pé* rhythm. Taken together, these 14 songs break new ground for **Forro in the Dark**, and extend the range of Brazil's favorite homegrown sound into entirely new territory.

"Light a Candle" (Release date: Oct 2009, Nat Geo Music)