

# UNTOLD STORIES

NEW

ALBUM



## **BENJI** **KAPLAN**

Following up his 2022 standards outing *Something Here Inside* (“fresh depths via unusual arrangements, imaginative counterpoint and complex internal voicings” – Howard Mandel, *DownBeat*), Manhattan-born guitarist Benji Kaplan returns to his primary focus—original compositions—on the absorbing new album *Untold Stories*. It is Kaplan’s 7th album and third solo guitar release, preceded by *Something Here Inside* and his all-original 2011 debut *Meditações no Violão*.

The first single from *Untold Stories*, “Xaxado em Alegria,” highlights Kaplan’s marvelous sound and projection on nylon-string acoustic guitar as he brings these passionate, richly melodic pieces to life. The crisp articulation and expressive breadth of Kaplan’s playing serves these compositions beautifully, resulting in one of the finest solo guitar outings in recent memory.

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Woodstock, NY



"These are stories I always wanted to tell," Kaplan remarks of *Untold Stories*, "but I never knew how to put them into words. So here they are on my guitar, in the universal language of music that I always return to when I don't feel understood in my native language, which in my case is English." Among Kaplan's stories are journeys through different landscapes, with references to chaotic New York, the warm and cheerful Northeast of Brazil and the backlands of Minas Gerais and its mysteries, as well as time travel, with references to the past, present and future.

The title track, for Kaplan, "expresses for me an urgency to burst in to tears in some places, to share a beautiful landscape in others, and in the A section it even implores you to take action. The story may even tell different tales from day to day, change narratives or narrators." The "Xaxado" is inspired "by the free-spirited joy that emanates and glows from my son when he smiles and laughs, explores undiscovered territory and meets new people," says Kaplan. "Streams, Hill and Forests" has a distinct Egberto Gismonti inspiration, while "An East Side Story" touches on not only Kaplan's East Side NYC upbringing but also those moments in life when he goes "slightly east of my North Star," taking roundabout paths toward a goal. "Oblivionism," meanwhile, evokes "a place that has no time or perhaps in a time that has no place. No man's land?"


Integral to the sound of Kaplan's music are regional Brazilian idioms such as choro, xaxado, waltz and modinha. Kaplan's frame of reference in a given moment might be the seven-string guitar language of Rio's samba and choro traditions, or Sinatra and Caymmi, or perhaps Rachmaninoff, Debussy and Mahler. Kaplan unites all these influences in a way that expands the parameters of the nylon-string acoustic guitar in jazz.


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A man with a beard and short hair is shown from the chest up, playing an acoustic guitar. He is looking upwards and to the right with a thoughtful expression. The background is a blurred cityscape with tall buildings. The lighting is soft, highlighting the man's face and the guitar. The guitar is a light-colored acoustic with a dark fretboard.

Then there's the beautiful "Choro de Inconsistência," of which Kaplan remarks: "The consistency of rhythm and tempo in a song can create a sense of stability and certainty. This song explores some of the uncertainty in life, in music, in art, the imprecision." "Illusion's Waltz" he calls "a melancholic carnival ride on a pinwheel," "a paradoxical paradise," a piece that "takes me to the home that can only be found in my head." "Stride and True" is of course a play on words, with certain references to stride piano and "an unconventional melodic rhythmic and harmonic narrative that pushes and pulls you in different directions between worlds of the past and the future." Closing with "The Vigilante," Kaplan muses on what he calls a "grey area" in the art of writing music: "Certain songs can create peace and calm in some, while causing disquiet and even harm to others. Can a composer be a vigilante of sorts? Perhaps yes."

In addition to his solo guitar work, Kaplan has given us the radically fresh, ambitious Brazilian chamber ensemble settings of Benji & Rita (with Rita Figueiredo), Uai Sô and Chorando Sete Cores, as well as the resplendent guitar-and-flute duo music of Reveries Em Som, featuring Anne Drummond. Born to a Cuban father of Russian Jewish descent and an Austrian Jewish mother, Kaplan has found a way to combine "New York, Central European, Latino and Brazilian cultures, resulting in a rich blend of sounds and colors," according to François Becquart of Music in Belgium. The deeply informed Brazilian focus of his original output to date has won him recognition as "a true ambassador of Brazilian music in New York" (Canal Musical).

# UNTOLD STORIES TRACK BY TRACK

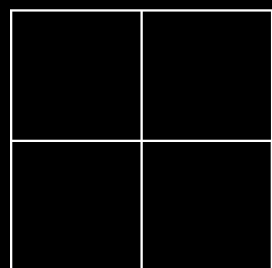
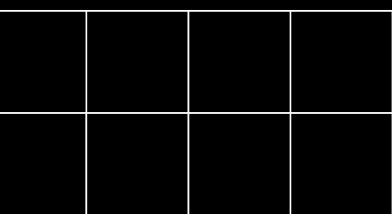


## 1. Untold Stories

The album's title track begins like a curtain that opens onto Benji Kaplan's private universe, full of dissonances that are sustained but reach their resolution, of crystalline flourishes that highlight his technical virtuosity and of beautiful counterpoints between the melody and harmony. In a modinha with an air of antiquity but redefined for current times, the composer transports the listener to the ancient stories of the backlands of Minas Gerais, with its country tales full of folklore. The cyclical structure of music takes us back to the cyclicity of human experience itself, in this first story that seems to invite the listener to another time-space: the internal one.

## 2. Xaxado em Alegria

In this rhythmic and solar melody, we enter another scenario: the Brazilian Northeast in times of June celebrations. The enthusiasm that embraces the beautiful and joyful in life, as well as its setbacks, imprints in the music memories of the composer's trip to Olinda and Recife in his youth. Kaplan's xaxado is also inspired by his young son and his infinite curiosity, his free and joyful spirit and the sparkle in his eyes when exploring unknown territories. The virtuoso reading of the rhythm brings difficult passages and tributes to great names in Brazilian music, such as Luiz Gonzaga and Gilberto Gil.





### 3. Oblivionism

Here, we truly enter an internal dive, a space in which the logic of time is suspended and nothing is exactly what it seems. The title, which can be translated as “forgetfulness”, reminds us of this lack of linearity in our subjectivity, with memories that make the past, present and future mix, taking us away from the practical life of everyday life. Beautiful resonances remind us that there is no right or wrong in the space of introspection, no good or bad dreams: judgments are suspended while the listener experiences this meditative sensation to the sound of the guitar.

### 5. An East Side Story

After a beautiful bucolic walk, An East Side Story takes us to the chaotic New York of the 1980s, the scene in which the composer grew up. The title refers to the east side of the city, where the neighborhood he lived in was located, and is a play on the classic musical West Side Story, by Leonard Bernstein. In this track, we feel the whirlwind of a big city, which presents us with unique images and people all the time, but there are so many that we cannot linger in this perplexity, we just let these spontaneous occurrences pass to make way for others to come. The architecture that mixes Gothic with futuristic developments from the 1970s is also felt in this mix of sensations, where many times coexist in one. Finally, the feeling of nostalgia itself seems to be in the spotlight. We live in the present dotted with memories of the past, like a good time that never comes back, but in the end, brings us a feeling of completeness. It can be a confusing, intense feeling, but ultimately, it seems like a good feeling.

### 4. Streams, Hills and Forests

“Streams, hills and forests” is the translation of the title of this song, which differs greatly from the previous track. The pulse becomes constant again, like the flow of nature that continues infinitely, regardless of everything. Branches and rocks may try to impede the flow of the river, but it continues on its way in its natural cycle. In the compositional process, Benji was inspired by the song Sete Anéis, by Egberto Gismonti, and the study he did of this arrangement, which, being of a high technical level, cost him a lot of effort. During the study, he realized that a new melody was unfolding, with other references and memories from his own history. Despite having aimed for one destination and arrived at another, the composer realized that this was a good lesson. “Sometimes, our incapacity or struggle becomes a great companion in the end”, he concludes.

### 6. Choro de Inconsistência

In yet another typically Brazilian musical genre, Kaplan makes this choro a reflection on the inconsistent nature of life. With harmonic chains reminiscent of Jacob do Bandolim, he invites us to a journey through time, where the past meets contemporary times, and this clash of generations makes us think about today's times. The musician was also inspired by the intangible that occupies the space between two people, who try to communicate but manage to do so only to a certain extent. “A child cries when he is hungry, but also when he wants something inexplicable. This song is the child who cries over something uncertain, just like a father who wants something from his child, but is equally unable to express it to him”, he comments. In this dance of relationships involving everyone around us, but more intensely our family members, we often fall into a frenzy of inconsistency only to find ourselves, briefly, then back to safety.





## 7. Illusion's Waltz

In this waltz of illusion, as the title says, we pass through the veil of subjectivity to once again be in an encounter with ourselves, in an alternation between what is real and what is of the order of introspection. It's as if, after an intense Carnival, we experienced the classic Ash Wednesday, with its melancholy, illusions and disappointments. The waltz takes us back to a cyclical time, like a wheel of fortune that is always turning, and accepting this destiny is part of our human condition. Only with moments of reunion with our private world can we deal with the constant illusions and disillusionments of life, with its loves that don't always stay but mark us, with trips that have already happened but that are somehow still happening, and with destinations which we don't always like but are inevitable.

## 9. The Vigilante

In this virtuoso melody that, to the delight of the listener, highlights the possibilities of the guitar and brings its sound crystal clear in solo format, it is possible to feel a carnival of colors and emotions that exquisitely concludes Benji Kaplan's seventh album. Themes that alternate in a spiral sometimes bring a feeling of adventure and courage, sometimes of difficult consequences of our choices. The title "vigilante" refers to dubious figures in our history who protect the people who need it most in often questionable ways. In this gray area, the vigilante, in a somewhat "Robinhoodian" attitude, seeks peace but does not exempt himself from war, potentially causing collateral damage along the way. "Certain music can create peace and calm in some, while causing unrest and even harm in others. Can a composer be a kind of vigilante? Maybe so", comments the composer.

## 8. Stride and True

The title of the eighth track on Untold Stories is a pun on the expression "tried and true", with the addition of "stride", of course the style of playing jazz on the piano that became popular in New York in the 1920s and 1930s, and which inspired the track's musicality. The burlesque tone carries a criticism of the absurdity that our relationships reach under capitalism, commonly permeated by money, interest and the emptying of meaning. At the same time, it is possible to feel that criticism does not exempt the composer himself from this condition: "we are sometimes a seller, a consumer, a performer, a storyteller, a braggart or a beggar", he says. It's all part of the journey.

# UNTOLD STORIES BENJI KAPLAN

**Street Date:** March 14 on Spotify and all digital platforms

composed produced, recorded and performed by Benji Kaplan

Mixed and mastered by Homero Lotito at Reference Mastering Studio in

São Paulo, Brazil

**website:** [benjikaplan.com](http://benjikaplan.com)



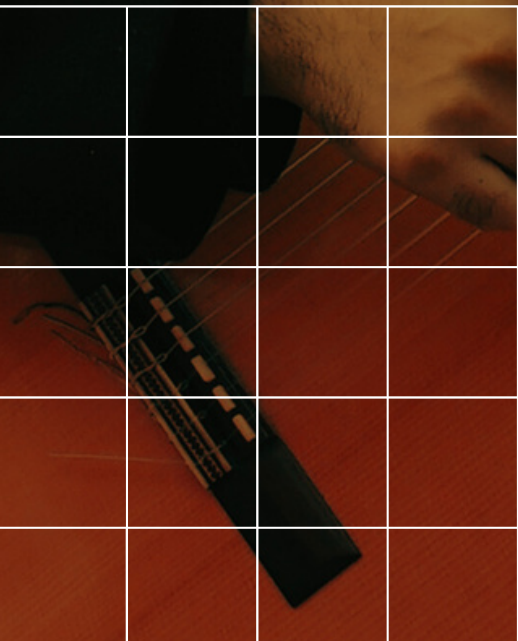


# SHORT BIO

**"It's a bit like Erik Satie was landing in a Rio Carnival"**

**- Music in Belgium**

An award-winning guitarist, composer, arranger, multi-lingual vocalist and educator, Benji Kaplan has performed in venues alongside world-renowned artists such as Junior Mance, Bernard Purdie, Earth Wind & Fire, Seu Jorge and Kassim. The son of a Cuban-Jewish percussionist father and an Austrian-Jewish visual artist mother, Kaplan made multiple excursions to Brazil as a teenager and an adult, and he offers a unique look at jazz and classical music informed by his vast musical experiences performing, writing, studying and playing with master Brazilian composers/performers since the age of 18. Guinga, the most recognized composer from Brazil after Jobim, has stated: "I think he is the greatest composer of Brazilian music to come from the United States... He is a genius."





# COMPLETE BIO

Benji Kaplan is an award winning guitarist, arranger, singer and composer. He has recorded seven albums and released 15 music videos, many of them selected at international film festivals. Born in 1985, he was raised in New York City but his musical influences are quite diverse, ranging from Cuban, European, African and especially Brazilian music.

Benji has been playing guitar since he was 11 years old, started performing professionally at 15 and later graduated from the New School University in Manhattan, where he honed in his skills as a jazz guitarist. He released his first album in 2011, entitled "Meditações no Violão", with his own compositions on solo guitar that include choros, baião, modinhas and other rhythms. The second release, "Reveries em Som" (2015), also features his own compositions, this time performed as a duo with flutist Anne Drummond. "Uai Sô" (2016), an album that was released the following year, also features Kaplan as a singer and arranger for various instruments. Such arrangements intensify in his next release, "Chorando Sete Cores" (2017), which features compositions with a quintet of winds, brass and strings.

Afterwards, he released the album "Benji & Rita" (2018) in partnership with singer and songwriter Rita Figueiredo, with 14 original songs accompanied by wind instruments, strings, brass and percussion. The work also yielded eight music videos, which won awards at festivals such as the NYC Indie Film Awards (USA), Calcutta International Cult Film Festival (India), Rome Prisma Film Awards (Italy) and Cinemafest (USA).

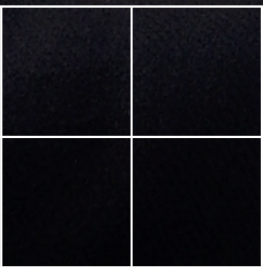
In 2022, "Something Here Inside" was released, an album in which Kaplan pays homage to important Broadway composers with arrangements for solo guitar of tunes by George Gershwin, Rodgers and Hart, Cole Porter and others. Finally, "Untold Stories" (2024) features nine new compositions performed on guitar, scheduled for release on March 14th.



His partnerships and collaborations include great artists from the Brazilian music scene, such as Makely Ka, Pedro Dias Carneiro (Vovô Bebê), Rita Figueiredo, Luiz Henrique Assis Garcia, Luiz Simas, Sergio Krakowski and Pedro Iaco. He has performed alongside artists such as Guinga, Junior Mance, Bernard Purdie, Benny Powell and Earth Wind & Fire, among many others, and has toured in several countries around the world, including Spain, Portugal, England and Germany.

In Brazil, he played on prestigious stages, such as Café Fon Fon, Beco das Garrafas, Teatro da Rotina, Rabeca Cultural, Bona Casa de Música, Teatro Idea, UFMG (Federal University of Minas Gerais) and Casa Viva Piracaia. In the United States, his performance history includes the Brasil Summerfest, O+ Festival, Omega Institute, Dizzy's Club, Musikfest and Cornelia street cafe among many others. Benji Kaplan has received critical acclaim with beautiful words from outlets such as JazzTimes that defined him as "a guitarist with impeccable technique and fluency" whose "poetic and refined compositions [are] played with a perfect balance of intellect and emotion".

Renowned Brazilian music journalist Tarik de Souza defined the album "Chorando Sete Cores" as "full of unexpected sonic solutions, spillways, deltas and estuaries, which lead to still unexplored paths, without pausing for the crutches of clichés." And about the same album, Geanine Reid, from All About Jazz, says that "it is a testament to Kaplan's skills as a composer, orchestrator and musical visionary of exquisite taste, all wrapped in the passion and style of Brazil."





# PRESS

"Imaginative nylon string explorations,  
nothing short of miraculous."

- **Acoustic Guitar Magazine**

"A guitarist with impeccable  
technique and fluency...a collection  
of poetic and refined compositions,  
played with a perfect balance of  
intellect and emotion"

- **JazzTimes**

"...distinct, lush and iconoclastic." - **DownBeat Magazine**

"...whimsical, deeply romantic sonic images  
of New York and Brazil." - **Jonathan Widran (LA Times)**

"...sophisticated, yet sensuous."

- **Jazz Weekly**

"full of unexpected sonic solutions that lead  
to still unexplored paths, without stopping  
for the crutches of clichés."

- **Tárik de Souza**

"...it's like Erik Satie was landing  
in a Rio carnival."

- **Music in Belgium (François Becquart)**

"A true ambassador of  
Brazilian music in New York"  
- **Marcelo Petti (Canal Musical)**

"I think he is the greatest  
composer of Brazilian music that I  
have heard in the United States"

"...he is a genius"

- **Guinga**

(Most recognized composer  
post Jobim from Brazil)

"...his performance has a didactic  
character!..."

"Its elaboration, crafted in one of the most  
beautiful patterns, which  
puts his interpretation among the best of all  
times!...absolutely personal!"

- **Helio Delmiro**

(Elis Regina, Djavan)