

Rodrigo Amarante

"I am trying to tell a story that is worth being told," says the Brazilian singer-songwriter who brings his soul-searching sounds to Portland this month

BY SUE ZALOKAR
STAFF WRITER

Rodrigo Amarante and I weren't connecting. He was late in receiving my call for this interview, followed by an afternoon of phone tag after he tracked down the number for the Street Roots office. In fact, I had pretty much written him off and moved on for the day, when, after a series of messages, we finally talked.

When I reached him, he was both grateful and apologetic, saying it isn't like him to miss a call. But he had good reason. Amarante — a Brazilian singer-songwriter and musician living in Los Angeles — was hacked the day before our conversation and a week before he left for a tour. Someone took over his e-mail account and sent out a pretty convincing version of him that asked his business manager to transfer all the money that he had in his business account to an account somewhere in Ohio. (I assured him, as an Ohio native, that although it is round on the ends and high in the middle, folks from Ohio aren't all bad).

Amarante was born in Rio de Janeiro. He is part of the bands Los Hermanos, Orquestra Imperial and Little Joy. He released his first solo record "Cavalo" in Brazil in 2013 and then in the United States in 2014. His music is tender and honest — a combination of his Brazilian roots, sonic complexity and sparsity. His album "Cavalo" made NPR's Bob Boilen's best albums of 2014, coming in at No. 3.

Amarante will open for Portland's own, Neko Case at Revolution Hall as a part of their grand opening, Saturday, April 18.

Sue Zalokar: Tell me about Butter. (A small Harmony parlor guitar from the '30s).

Rodrigo Amarante: Oh! How did you hear about Butter?

S.Z. I watched a Tiny Desk Concert you did for NPR and you were playing this small Harmony parlor guitar from the 30s and I wondered if it had some personal significance for you.

R.A. Before I found that guitar, I was already touring this record. It's not a guitar that I have owned for a number of years.

Butter was made in the 1920s. It was a

guitar that was destroyed, pretty much. I have a friend who has a guitar shop here in L.A. and what he does is grabs these old guitars that have been neglected and fixes them up and puts an electric guitar pickup on them. This one in particular is an oddball because it has Japanese, '60s electric guitar pickup, but the way (my friend) put it together it sounds almost like a banjo. No sustain. It's very backyard sounding.

It is somewhat a cross with the classical guitar, because it doesn't have any sustain and it sounds dark. But in a different way, it is nothing like what you would expect a Latin American to play. It sounds more like

some Kentucky backyard parlor guitar. So, I thought that was great — another instance where I can blur a line. It sounded perfect. It blended all of these elements.

There is something interesting about the way my record is perceived at first or the tendencies for how it should be marketed or viewed. I am aware of that confusion. It's part of my plan too — artistically, of course. Commercially, I have no talent.

S.Z. What do you mean?

R.A. Making a record that has three

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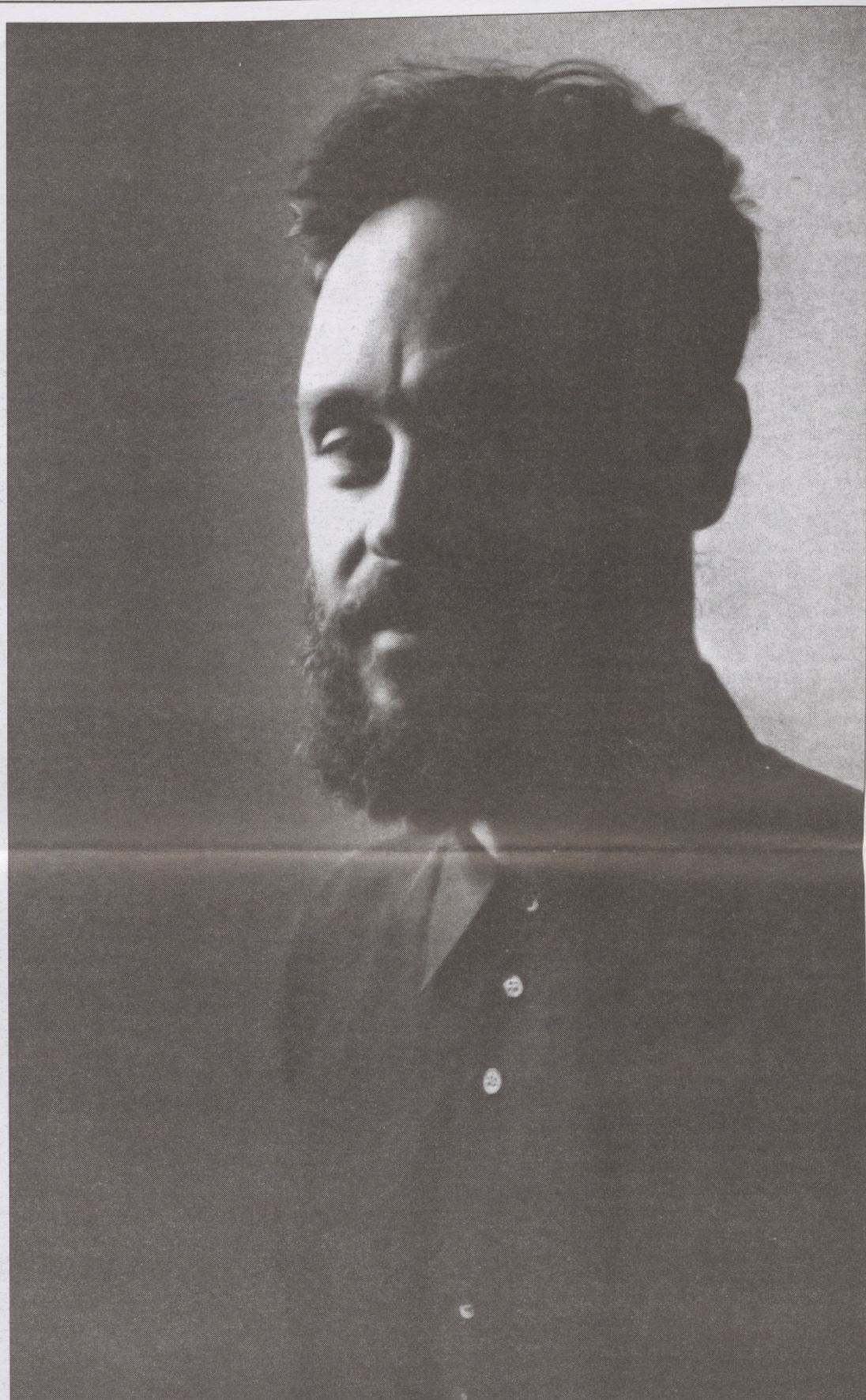


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