

# Time Out

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## Milton Nascimento

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The fragility, faith and warrior spirit of an entire country are present in the haunting quaver of Milton Nascimento, the singer-composer whom many Brazilians regard as their defining voice. Raised in the southeastern state of Minas Gerais, a onetime center of African slaves, Nascimento became famous in the late '60s; his songs about the struggle for survival and a higher protective force helped keep Brazilians strong as they suffered through a murderous dictatorship. In a land so troubled that belief in God is almost essential to life, his unearthly falsetto is the sound of the angels who wait at the end of a hard road.

Sixty-three this month and an international star, Nascimento can look back on collaborations with Paul Simon, Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter and his late mentor, Elis Regina, Brazil's greatest female singer of the last 40 years. The composer himself has grown weaker, due largely to diabetes. Onstage, he sits semimobile with

his guitar, holding forth with the frail majesty of a pope, which is how these shows at the Blue Note—his first New York appearances since 2000—will probably be. Nascimento is touring to promote the American issue of *Pietá* (Savoy Jazz), an emotional tribute to the women who shaped him. Amid throbbing Afro-Brazilian rhythms, percussive wind sounds and waterfalls of strings is the saintly tranquillity of that voice; it assures us, in the words of his lyricist Fernando Brant, that “everything is beautiful in my world/ And fits inside my song.”—James Gavin

