

THE MUSIC, OR THE ART OF BEING UNIQUE

Antonio Carlos Jobim was perhaps the most uncommitted of all the Brazilian musicians that became institutions. Uncommitted and, in several ways, unique. A rapid appraisal might not perceive this, but the maestro kept well away from the aesthetic trends of our popular music. Let's see: He wrote slow samba-canção with an almost subliminal rhythm at a time when another institution, Ary Barroso, held up the flag of traditional samba ("Samba, without that 'telecoteco' beat, is not samba", Ary claimed in the lyrics of "É Luxo Só".)

He helped establish Bossa Nova, when many of his friends - with Lúcio Rangel out in front - fought for the return of the old bossa.

He went for the most complex orchestral flights at a time when they were hoping to see him armed with just a guitar, like João Gilberto.

His music celebrated a Brazil full of rivers, forests and skies, when he was in the middle of a very successful international career, with everyone betting on his Americanisation under the blessings of the jazz musicians of the West Coast and of the big boss, Frank Sinatra. And when it was believed that those orchestral flights would take him onto more daring projects, he set up a family band, with female voices and hardly any instruments, to live out the last shows and albums of his career.

Not that Antônio Carlos Jobim was an artist deliberately set on opposing the established rules. If he did not consider himself a bossa-nova man it was because he thought, without false modesty, that his participation in the so-called movement had not been very intense, just fortuitous. If his passage on stages of festivals was meteoric (at a time when all composers in the country saw in those musical competitions the most effective way of displaying their work to the public at large), the reason was not the merciless booing with which "Sabiá" was received, but the certainty that that was not the window to show off his songs, which were made to listen to, not to animate fan clubs. And if he became conscious of Tropicalism it was not just out of opposition to it, but more out of the discovery that it had nothing to do with him, as a man or as a musician. "To tell the truth", he said in an interview at the time, with that typical alienation of his, "I'm not sure what it is".

There was, at the time of death, an inevitable concern to label his work, to classify him, fit him into a certain movement, school, tendency or phase of