

**T**he celebration of the 40th anniversary of the bossa nova -- based on the date of its "official" birthday, the recording of the legendary version of "Chega de Saudade" by Elizeth Cardoso and João Gilberto in January 1958 -- is a good opportunity to revise some concepts as well as to clarify some points.

As the tracks in this compilation clearly demonstrate, "bossa nova music" preceded the "bossa nova movement," the latter being basically a mass-media invention that gave rise to all those legends about reunions in the apartments of young middle-class girls and boys in such areas of Rio de Janeiro as Ipanema and Copacabana. In fact, bossa nova was already practically in its teens when these reunions, along with the famous shows in Copacabana's "Beco das Garrafas," started taking place.

Yet the genius who promoted this revolution in Brazilian music, in terms of rhythm, melody and harmony, was not even born in Rio, but in Bahia, and he presented the new concept to his colleagues when he arrived for the second time in Rio in 1957, back from an eight-month stay in the small city of Diamantina (Minas Gerais), which he had spent isolated in the home of some relatives. What exactly happened there, only God knows. But what happened when João Gilberto showed his "new style" in Rio, all the world knows...

One by one, all of Gilberto's fans (and enemies) became shocked at what they were hearing: a new samba beat, a new way of singing, new concepts of harmonizing, and so forth. As to the beat, many maintain (rightly) that Gilberto adapted for the guitar a type of beat that João Donato had already been employing some years before on the piano, and even on early recordings as accordionist. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Gilberto perfected that beat, being influenced simultaneously by the modern guitar approach of Luiz Bonfá and Garôto.

**A**t the same time, Gilberto developed a new singing style -- very soft, subtle and charming. Antonio Carlos Jobim, one of the first to hear that "magic," was totally fascinated, and began to compose new material inspired by Gilberto's style, songs that basically were created to be sung by him. That was the beginning of the "bossa nova repertoire."

Following the release of Cardoso's version of "Chega de Saudade," the effect of Gilberto's revolution spread even more. Guitarists everywhere were trying to play like him, to the point that the ones who learned the beat very quickly opened "guitar schools," at which they taught "how to play like João Gilberto." Even already established arrangers, such as Lindolpho Gaya, Lyrio Panicalli and Leo Perachi, revised their styles, opening their ears to that new music, which demanded less pompous orchestrations and lighter ornamentation, closer to the impressionistic notions of Debussy and Ravel, two major influences on Jobim's harmonic conception -- along with Villa-Lobos, of course.

This first bossa nova period extended from 1962, the year when the bossa craze began in the USA. At the same time, in Brazil, a second generation of bossa nova composers/musicians/arrangers started to display their strong potential. But, while Gilberto was "cool," they were "hot": in contrast to that early soft sonority based essentially on guitar and voice, they preferred to play in trios, quintets, large ensembles; indeed, some even refused to use the "bossa nova" label. And then a new wave, "samba-jazz," took over the music scene. It was a truly brilliant generation and their talents eventually transcended the bossa nova boundaries.

Gilberto continues his perpetual evolution to this very day. Every time he plays one of the songs that he has been playing for forty years, he does so employing new syncopations and new phrasings. Furthermore, everything he plays becomes bossa nova. That is why we can say that the bossa nova is João Gilberto, yet João Gilberto is bossa nova and much more. Cheers!

Arnaldo DeSouteiro, May 1998

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