

lyrics by de Moraes, who was also a poet and playwright. And there was a wistful quality, often a pervading fatalism, as in Jobim's song "Vivo Sonhando" ("I Live Dreaming"). He and I would eventually render it into English as "Dreamer".

The lyrics reflect an influence of the Portuguese folk song known as *fado* ("fate"), and this in turn may be the consequence of the centuries of domination by the Moors of the Iberian Peninsula. A central tenet of Islam is *kismet*, the fatalistic acceptance of the will of God. Jobim and his colleague Sergio Mendes both thought that this hypothesis was a reasonable explanation of the nature of the bossa nova lyrics.

Jobim had explained that the lyric to "Desafinado" (by Newton Mendonça) was a joke — sly, gentle fun poked at those older singers and songwriters who criticized bossa nova composers. The traditionalists said that these new songs were hard to sing. They said they were "crooked": "Desafinado" contains a melody note that is a flatted fifth, one of the hallmarks of bebop. In F, the second chord of the song is G7b5, with the melody landing on the D-flat. This note drove conventional Brazilian singers crazy, Jobim said. The whole bossa nova controversy reminds one of the bebop vs. moldy fig animosity in jazz, of which in a way it is a descendant.

It is impossible, of course, to translate any song verbatim: it simply won't fit the music in the other language. One has to understand the song's essence and reconstruct it as closely as possible in the second language. The first thing that is lost in any translation is humor. Humor, particularly plays on words, cannot be translated at all. The Brazilian record companies were in the practice of printing lyrics on the back of LP jackets, long before this was done in North America. With those lyrics and a dictionary in front of me, I was able to render fairly close approximations of the two songs, "Desafinado" and "Corcovado", in English.

Later, in New York, Jobim and I added a verse to "Desafinado". The song supposes a girl of flawless character who looks down her nose a little at her suitor, who is singing the song:

#### Verse

*Every time I sing, you say I'm off key.  
Why can't you see how much this hurts me?  
With your perfect beauty and your perfect pitch,  
You're a perfect [pause for a silent rhyme] terror.  
When I come around,  
Must you always put me down?*

#### Chorus

*If you say my singing is off key, my love, [on the flat five]  
You will hurt my feelings, don't you see, my love?  
I wish I had an ear like yours, a voice that would behave.  
All I have is feeling and the voice God gave.*

*You insist my music goes against the rules.  
Ah, but rules were never made for lovesick fools.  
I wrote this little song for you, but you don't care.  
It's a crooked tune. Ah, but all my love is there.*

*The thing that you would see, if you would do your part,  
Is even if I'm out of tune, I have a gentle heart.  
I took your picture with my trusty Rolleiflex  
And find that all I have developed is a complex.*

(The reference to the Rolleiflex is in the original. The line is, more or less: I photographed you with my Rolleiflex, and what has developed is your enormous ingratitude. It's funnier in Portuguese; I couldn't make it work in English.)