

In 1974, in the Sunset Marquis hotel in West Hollywood, Gene Lees conducted the following interview when he was working on the lyrics for "Double Rainbow" with Antonio Carlos Jobim. By then the composer spoke quite a bit of English.

"You told me your father was a poet and a diplomat."

"Yes, that's true," he said. "He was gone very soon. He died when I was eight. And I remember him very vaguely." (Jobim was born in 1927.)

"Do you think the poetic instinct was passed on to you?"

He laughed. "I think probably. I'm a musician, but I like words, I like lyrics, I like literature. He was not a musician at all, you know. He had a very bad musical ear. It was not his business. And later on, my mother remarried. My stepfather helped me a lot. I was very prejudiced about music. I thought playing piano was something for girls. I liked to play soccer on the beach. A piano came. You know, we rented a piano. My sister was supposed to study. But she didn't want to study the piano, the scales. And I started fooling around with the piano. I was about twelve, thirteen. I fooled around with this old piano, an old Bechstein. My stepfather always pushed me up."

"Was he a musician?"

"No, an engineer. He's still alive. He has nothing to do with music. But he always thought that I would be a good musician. And I was kind of scared. My mother had a school." The school was the Brasileiro de Almeida Music School.

"There was a teacher from Germany." Jobim was referring to Hans Joachim Koellreutter, who was one of the early champions of Brazilian dodecophonist composers.

"He was very helpful. He taught me the basic things. Later on he gave me some composition and harmony. He was not the dumb piano teacher. He opened my eyes. If you just memorize little pieces and don't know what you're doing, it's no use. You scare off the kid from music."

Jobim's guitar was resting on the bed of his hotel suite. The windows were open and the California birds were singing. He was never without a guitar (although piano was his primary instrument).

"All the Brazilians play the guitar. It is quite a national instrument. I also used to fool around with the guitar. I have two uncles. One of them used to play classical guitar, the Spanish repertoire and Bach, these famous pieces for the guitar. My other uncle used to play popular songs and accompany himself. He could sing well. So this was the basic music around me when I was a kid.

"Then I got a harmonica, a Hohner, that could play all the twelve tones: chromatic. There was a group of kids that got together, and we made a band with a bass and harmonicas. We made arrangements. We would distribute the voicings.

"I went to architecture school because I wanted to marry [Tereza Hermanny, who became Mrs. Jobim]; I wanted to be somebody respectable. Not a musician. I should be a doctor or something. In Brazil, you call a doctor an engineer. If you are an engineer they will call you Dr. Something. I went to the school for one year. Then we had this terrible fight. I thought I was not going to marry her. I quit the whole thing. I said, 'The hell with it, I'm not gonna be an architect.'"

Their son, Paulo, would become an architect as well as a musician.

"Music had been till then just a hobby. A passionate hobby. I was crazy about music. I decided to be a professional. I tried to study more and more, get deeply involved. Finally we got together again. We got married. And I needed money to pay the rent. We moved from my mother's house. It was very difficult.