

famous by Vicki Carr and the Lovin' Spoonful, sneaking up on show tunes from Broadway and Hollywood, and introducing American audiences to then-current ballads and novelties from her native land.

This view of Astrud as pop singer doesn't require any revisionism, since it was shared by those hearing her mid-Sixties recordings the first time around. Writing in *down beat* about one of Astrud's earlier Verve albums, Michael Zwerin called it "a five-star popular record" — he loved her "innocent, charming, sexy sound" — but judged it worthy of just a "three-star jazz rating". In 1967, reviewing *A Certain Smile*, the same magazine's Pete Welding reflected a similar view but offered a much harsher assessment of Astrud's unique style. Pointing out her intonation problems, Welding said that, while she had certainly progressed since the "accidental outset" of her singing career, "it will be interesting to see just how far the limits of artlessness may be pushed in her subsequent recordings". He praised her "unaffected charm", but stated, from a jazz perspective, that "you just can't take [her singing] very seriously".

Astrud herself, despite her love of and feel for jazz, never sought to claim the territory previously staked out by Ella, Carmen, Sarah, or the other unquestioned jazz divas. In the mid-Eighties, in an interview with France's *Jazz Magazine*, she was asked what kind of music she sang then. Her answer might well have proven just as accurate fifteen years earlier, when she was recording *A Certain Smile* and *Beach Samba*:

"I still believe that the simplest thing to do is what pleases you. I sing what I like, whether the song is American, French, or something else. What's more, I have recorded all kinds of Brazilian music, not only bossa nova — there are so many different rhythms! American ballads, jazz tunes, even some rock or disco stuff — yet always with a definite jazz influence."

That description could more or less apply to the general state of American pop singing circa 1965, a style that Astrud Gilberto had certainly mastered at the time of these recordings. True, her intonation wavered (no oscilloscope on the planet would confirm her pitch); and true, she lacked the larger-than-life delivery and showbiz glamor that marked the pop stars of other decades. But Astrud sang in the Sixties — a time of Twiggy and *The Graduate*, of flower power and long straight hair, when sexy and innocent were not yet mutually exclusive terms — and by the truest measure of her artistic success, she reflected her era in her music. With her waiflike exoticism and unruffled sweetness, you could say that this album belongs in a time capsule, but more accurately, it *is* a time capsule.

The music itself bears not only the badge of those times but several minor scars as well. Take, for example, **I Had the Craziest Dream**, a lovely song introduced by Helen Forrest in the 1942 film *Springtime in the Rockies* (which coincidentally featured Carmen Miranda, the best-known Brazilian entertainer prior to Astrud Gilberto). Astrud's almost disengaged reading of the tune makes it even dreamier than the original, and it dresses up fine as a bossa nova, reminding us of the idiom's versatility and resilience; then, during the instrumental interlude, a series of inane harpsichord accents remind us of the Sixties fascination with cheesy and inappropriate keyboard sounds. The Brazilian songs, such as **Oba, Oba** and the haunting **Tu Meu Delirio**, show the state of the art in Brazilian song writing of the day; for balance, consider the quintessential Sixties sappiness of such American tunes as **Misty Roses** and Astrud's duet with her then six-year-old son on the Spoonful's **You Didn't Have to Be So Nice**.

Beach Samba is a period piece, yes — and one that contains some of Astrud Gilberto's most representative work. After the accidental outset of her career, she proved to have enough musical savvy to remain "unprofessional" — or at least to sound that way — in an era that venerated such an approach. In 1967, the Girl from Ipanema was still heading beachward, and those who heard her still tended to sigh.

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