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Jazzletter

P.O. Box 240
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March 1995 Vol. 14 No. 3

Um Abraço No Tom
Part One

Some time in the 1960s, I interviewed Robert Russell Bennett in his office, which overlooked Sixth Avenue in New York. He was then, I would think, about seventy: he was born in Kansas City on June 15, 1894. His peers called him Russ, but I took no such liberty, being much his junior and certainly not his peer. I called him Mr. Bennett, and I meant it.

Bennett was one of the countless American composers trained and shaped by Nadia Boulanger, whose influence on American music is inestimable. (Eventually I had the chance to interview her, too.) I knew Bennett, though, not so much for his *Concerto Grosso* and other compositions as for his orchestrations: he was for a long time the premier arranger and orchestrator of Broadway musicals. One of the shows he scored was Gershwin's opera *Porgy and Bess*.

Bennett talked of Gershwin as if he were some sort of idiot savant. Nor was he the only one who spoke of him that way: Gershwin's almost childlike self-admiration inspired Oscar Levant's famous quip: "An evening with George Gershwin is a George Gershwin evening."

Bennett said that Gershwin had a peculiar capacity to pick up any musical thought that was in the air and use it. He came just short of calling him a plagiarist.

Somewhat taken aback, I said, "But Mr. Bennett, how is it that you can hear only two or three bars of a song and know that it's a Gershwin tune?"

"Ah," he said, "but that's genius."

Not talent. Genius.

I have never forgotten that remark and have mused on its import. Genius is not simply a higher order of talent; it is a different thing altogether, and it is very mysterious.

I have had cause to reflect on this in the months since the death of Antonio Carlos Jobim. Because of our collaboration on songs, I get calls and letters from people wanting to know more about him. And I selected and annotated a compact disc of his work for Verve, which caused me to listen to a huge body of it over and over for quite a few days. And I found that, now that he had vanished into time, I was in awe of it. What Robert Russell Bennett said of Gershwin applies to Jobim.

If you examine the song *Dindi*, you'll find that it's not terribly unusual, harmonically or melodically. The problem is that it *is* unusual, and I can't tell you why. It has a distinct but ineffable quality; it is one of the most beautiful songs I know.

The gift of writing melody is a mysterious one. Not every educated musician has it; Nelson Riddle and Gil Evans didn't. Nor does lack of education preclude it: Irving Berlin had no musical education whatsoever, and Harry Warren didn't have much, but each of them had an inexhaustible gift of melody.

As the nineteenth century was drawing to a close, the harmonic practices of European concert music had become ponderously complicated. This led to the thought, embodied in the work of Arnold Schoenberg and his successors, that the system was exhausted and would have to be replaced with one in which all tones were considered equal. That is the essential reasoning in the system usually referred to as atonalism — a term to which even Schoenberg objected, although it has gained currency. After World War II, German composers embraced Schoenbergian music and its derivations almost with ferocity. The music historian Henry Pleasants, author of *The Agony of Modern Music* and *Serious Music and All That Jazz* (both of which infuriated the avant-garde establishment) lived in Germany in those post-war years. Henry says that the embrace of that kind of music was largely political. Schoenberg was Jewish, and by emulating him, the composers were able to make the statement, in essence: No I was never a Nazi.

Whatever its evolution, this philosophy of composition has led to a huge body of music that only a small audience wants to hear, coupled to a sniffy condescension toward such melodists as Edvard Grieg. The attitude of many persons, and not only laymen, toward this "modern" music is perhaps best embodied in one of the more steely rejoinders of Sir Thomas Beecham. Asked if he knew Stockhausen, he said, "No, but I think I stepped in some once."

The infinitely melodic Sergei Rachmaninoff remains immensely popular, to the discomfiture of the avant-garde. And in recent years Samuel Barber has come into some of the recognition I long thought he deserved. And Aaron's Copland's more accessible works, such as *Appalachian Spring* and *Billy the Kid*, maintain a popularity that his more prickly works have not achieved.

What fascinates me about Jobim is the range and depth and power of his ability to make new, fresh, distinctive music out of conventional materials. To be sure, to North Americans, the samba was not conventional material, but to Brazilians it was and, in part influenced by American so-called west coast jazz, particularly the music of Gerry Mulligan, Jobim and some of his friends revolutionized Brazilian popular music. Jobim gave us some of the most exquisite melodies of the twentieth century, and, when he wrote with poets of the stature of Vinicius de Moraes, truly magnificent songs — that wedding of words to music that remains the favorite and most enduring of musical forms.

The period from about 1920 to 1955 produced a formidable number of magnificent melodists in the United States, including Jerome Kern, Cole Porter, George Gershwin, Harold Arlen, Hoagy Carmichael, Richard Rodgers, Vincent Youmans, and Arthur Schwartz, who found the outlet for their talent in the Broadway musical theater and film, all of them masters at the creation of exquisite musical miniatures.

The decline of melodicism in American musical theater dates from approximately the mid-1950s, although the omens of decline were apparent in such examples of Tin Pan Alley trash as *Papa Loves Mambo* and *Hot Diggity Dog Diggity*.

But in Brazil, in the late 1950s, a new birth of melodicism was occurring, a movement that would become known as bossa nova. The central figure was Antonio Carlos Jobim.

My first encounter with his music came in the fall of 1961, in an album issued on Capitol by one João Gilberto. Something on its

cover mentioned the samba. My knowledge of samba was limited to the performances of Carmen Miranda, singing and dancing giddily under a headdress of tropical fruit in movies. I didn't like samba, or thought I didn't; but then I knew nothing about it, nothing about the rich tradition of music by Ary Barroso (who wrote the magnificent *Brazil*) and Dorival Caymmi.

When at last I got around to listening to the album, I was electrified by the music. It was far from Carmen Miranda, or at least the Carmen Miranda who was exploited as a sort of joke in Hollywood movies. Jobim had arranged it; he also wrote a number of its songs, including one called *Corcovado*. I had no idea how closely I would become associated with that song, and others of Jobim's compositions. At that same time, Dizzy Gillespie played an engagement at the Sutherland Lounge in Chicago. With him at the time was a young pianist and composer from Argentina who had lived for a time in Rio de Janeiro — Lalo Schifrin. Dizzy was regularly playing a Jobim tune titled *Desafinado*. Lalo Schifrin came to my home one afternoon and showed me its chord changes on a little beige-colored Wurlitzer electric piano I owned at that time. (I wish I still did; those were lovely little instruments.)

The harmony in all the Jobim songs was thoughtful and skilled, reflecting not only Jobim's taste for jazz but for the French Impressionist composers. *Insensatez* begins with a harmonic pattern similar to the Chopin *E minor prelude*. Later, we used to tease Jobim about this resemblance, and he would note the point where it departs from Chopin's harmony. Pulling his leg more, Gerry Mulligan recorded the *E minor prelude* with a bossa nova feeling.

The Brazilians had solved the problem of the ballad. As the song form evolved in the United States, the harmonic content became more sophisticated, nowhere more so than in the music of Jerome Kern. Jazz particularly relied on harmonic interest. The sequences of chords contributed to the forward motion. Harmonically, Kern's music was years ahead of most jazz.

But whereas this new Brazilian music was harmonically interesting, the composers did not depend so heavily on this factor for motion. This was due to the nature of the rhythmic pattern.

The music, as I learned later, was largely notated in 2/4 time, unlike American ballads, the vast majority of which are in 4/4. (When these Brazilian songs were brought north, publishers had them re-notated in 4/4.)

The bass player used an eighth-note pickup just before the first beat of each bar, setting up a da-boom, da-boom pattern. And the drummer played a pattern of eighth notes over this, often with other percussion instruments added. This gave the songs motion, even in cases where the composer chose to sit on one chord for a comparatively long time. The rhythms were complex and incredibly stimulating, even in the gentlest ballads, such as Jobim's *Outra Vez* and *Meditação*.

Not long after I began to be familiar with this music — Jobim's as well as that of Carlos Lyra and some other Brazilians — I was approached about making a State Department journey as tour manager through all Latin America (except Cuba) with the Paul Winter Sextet. It was in part my interest in this new music that impelled me to go. We left Chicago on February 1, 1962.

The tour lasted nearly six months. We traveled down the west coast of South America, then crossed to Argentina. In Buenos Aires I began to hear still more of João Gilberto and Jobim, including two albums that had not yet been issued in the U.S. Since I spoke French and Spanish, I was able to deduce — sometimes with the help of new friends — the meaning of the lyrics, and I was beginning to memorize them.

After stops in Paraguay and Uruguay, we entered Brazil — a nation even larger than the continental United States — from the south, first landing in Porto Alegre. Samba seemed to be everywhere. The country really seemed to swing — *balançar*, as they say in Portuguese. I remember a young man in an elevator playing a samba with a set of keys on a ring. I saw a donkey pulling a two-wheel cart; even that animal seemed to swing. I was already familiar with a song that João Gilberto had recorded, Dorival Caymmi's *Samba de Minha Terra* — Samba of My Land. The release says: Whoever doesn't like samba isn't a good guy. He is bad in the head or sick in the foot. I was born with the samba, in the samba I was created. From the damned samba I have never separated.

We played a concert in some small town, I no longer remember where. And then we were to go to Rio de Janeiro (it means River of January), the place we all wanted to be and see. We were to be flown there by the Brazilian air force in a Lockheed Lodestar that had once been the property of President Juscelino Kubitschek, who had been elected on October 3, 1955 — a little over six years earlier — and instituted a period of industrial expansion, growth, prosperity, and great optimism in Brazil. I do not think it is coincidence that the bossa nova movement came to pass during his administration. It was Kubitschek who caused the building of Brasilia as the country's capital. A great lover of music, he commissioned Jobim and Vinicius de Moraes to write a piece for the city's inauguration, *Brasilia, Sinfonia da Alvorada*, meaning Symphony of the Dawn.

We encountered an example of a peculiar waywardness that is common in and perhaps even characteristic of Brazil. The pilot who had been assigned to us didn't arrive. We sat by the plane on the tarmac in the sun, luggage around us. I finally went in search of the pilot. He was playing tennis and didn't feel like leaving yet. I beseeched him: we had a concert that night in Rio. But he finished his game, and we got into the plane and left.

We flew above high white clouds, and then at last came in between two billowing banks of them to see Rio lying in the sun in front of us, Sugar Loaf, Corcovado with the statue of Jesus, arms outstretched as if to embrace the world, Guanabara Bay, and the spreading ocean beyond it. I once told Charles Aznavour that I thought Paris was the most beautiful city in the world until I saw

Rio. Charles said, "Paris *is* the most beautiful city in the world. But Rio has the most beautiful setting."

We played our concert and, the next day, I searched out a man named Enrique Lebendiger, who owned a company called Fermata do Brasil. Fermata published a lot of the Jobim songs. I arranged a meeting with Lebendiger, who turned out to be Swiss, and told him that I thought these new songs could function in English. I said I wanted to try my hand at translating them and therefore would like to meet Jobim and some of the others. Lebendiger urged me to have nothing to do with Jobim. He said he was crazy and difficult. He said I should go ahead and make translations without seeing him. I told him I couldn't do that. Finally he gave me a telephone number for João Gilberto.

I called the number and reached what seemed to me to be a very shy housewife named Astrud Gilberto. She was completely unknown in music; within eighteen months she would be internationally famous. She spoke a little English and told me that her husband was rehearsing that evening at Jobim's house, and she gave me a phone number. I called Jobim and, somehow, managed to communicate that I wanted to meet him. He invited me to the rehearsal. I must confess I was thrilled: I was heading right to the heart of the bossa nova movement.

Few encounters in my life remain as vivid in memory as that one. It was raining heavily that night; I suppose I took a taxi out to the Ipanema area. And, needless to say, the Leo Robin-Arthur Schwartz song asking what do you do on *A Rainy Night in Rio* was running in my head.

Jobim lived in a modest little house on a street not far from the beach. I knocked at the door. I suppose something about the dignity of his name, Antonio Carlos Jobim, had led me to expect someone much older. It is odd how we build impressions around names, and how often they turn out to be wildly inaccurate. He turned out to be only a year older than I.

Jobim was born in Rio. "Brazilian" was literally his middle name: Antonio Carlos Brasileiro de Almeida Jobim. His birthdate was January 25, 1927, and thus he was an Aquarian, which became one of the jokes and a faint little commonality between us. Sergio Mendes too is an Aquarian. I was born February 8. Sergio was born in the Rio suburb of Niteroi on February 11, 1941. In later years whenever I would encounter either of them he would say something like, "How's the other Aquarian?" Or "What do you hear from the other Aquarian?"

But who could foresee that? I stood under a little overhang, out of the rain: I remember the shine of streetlamps on the wet street, patterned with the moving shadows of trees. The door opened, and a very handsome young man stood in the light from his living room. Jobim was then thirty-four. He invited me in.

João Gilberto sat on the sofa, curled around his guitar, singing with a vocal group called, as I learned, Os Cariocas, the Cariocas. (Cariocas are the natives of Rio.) I had become fascinated by his singing through the recordings. It was a very fresh approach to singing, infinitely soft and almost devoid of vibrato, yet warm with some sort of hidden passion withal. But I could not have imagined how truly soft his voice was: you could scarcely hear him five or six feet away in a small living room.

Jobim invited me to the kitchen, which was off the living room to the right as you entered. He opened a bottle of Johnnie Walker's and poured two drinks, the first of many we would share. He spoke only a few words of English, but I had found that a great many educated people in South America, whether Spanish or Portuguese speaking, knew French, and I tried French on him. As it turned out, his family background was French: the name was originally Jobin. I had also come to realize that Spanish and Portuguese are sufficiently similar that if I spoke Spanish very slowly, Brazilians would understand me, although I had tried that once in a barber shop and got the weirdest haircut of my life.

So Jobim and I that night spoke a bizarre mixture of French and Spanish. Years later I told him that Brazilian Portuguese, with all its dentalizations and buzzing sounds, sounded to me like a mixture of Spanish and French as spoken by a Russian. And still later, he told me that he remembered my remark once in an airport in Europe. He observed several men standing together talking, and thought from the distant sound of their voices that they were Brazilians. He approached them only to discover that they were speaking Russian. There is something similar about the rhythm. In later years, one of the things Jobim and I shared was a fascination with language. I would learn a lot about language from him.

I told him that night that I thought his songs could be and should be translated into English. He was fascinated by this and urged me to try doing it, which, within a day or two, I would. We had several more drinks; he and I would never have only a few. I always remember the way he pronounced Scotch, with that peculiar Carioca vowel. It came out almost Sco-watch. And then, indicating João Gilberto in the living room, he said something to which I should have paid more attention; at the time I took it as merely a joke. He said, and this was in English, "I am crazy. He is more crazy." How true that was.

I told him that he slightly reminded me of Gerry Mulligan, and it was then that he told me that Mulligan was one of the inspirations behind the bossa nova movement. He said that the street samba of Brazil was passionate and hot, and his ideal had been to calm it down for the recording studio, after the manner of the Mulligan tentet and quartet records, without losing the swing. "We must not lose important things," he said.

"The samba," he said to me at a much later date, "is basically a Negro-European thing. It has roots very similar to the jazz roots: the Portuguese song with the Negro beat and the Negro feeling. And also samba is not just samba. There are ten or twelve different beats of samba. But that's the main stream. We have other things, like baihão, like maracatu, many different rhythms.

"But samba is the main stream, the main road. Bossa nova could be called a branch, one of the many branches that samba has.

"The regular samba, the street samba, the Carnaval samba, has

all kinds of percussion instruments, and cans and tambours and tambourines, whatever you can think. The bossa nova had this advantage. It was kind of washed, more concise, less noise, less things going on, easier to record in a studio. Because I had tremendous experience recording *Black Orpheus*. With twenty guys playing percussion, it sounds like the sea. The holes are filled, there's no space left. Bossa nova came with a very detached beat, very characteristic, that cleaned the whole thing. It was cleaner. It was easier. And maybe because of that it became more universal."

I listened to the rehearsal. João Gilberto was singing *Só Dançe Samba*, which means I dance only samba, a humorous little song about someone who says he has danced the twist too much, has danced calypso and cha-cha-cha, and now wants to dance only samba. It was a matter of months until he and Jobim would record that with Stan Getz in New York.

When I left that evening, I told Jobim that I would try to translate one or two of his songs before leaving Rio. We arranged to have lunch a day or two later. There were some booking problems with our tour, and so while the Paul Winter group did what musicians call runouts — side trips to smaller centers — I stayed behind in Rio to telephone ahead from the U.S. Embassy. The group went to Brasilia; I never did see Brasilia.

In the next day or two I wrote English lyrics, remaining as close as possible to the spirit of the Portuguese originals on two of Jobim's songs, *Corcovado* and *Desafinado*.

I had become almost as fascinated by the lyrics of the songs as by the music. I was intrigued by all the fresh (to me) rhymes I was discovering, failing at first to see that as we have our cliches in English, so do songs in Portuguese. Brazilians endlessly rhyme song, guitar, and heart — *canção, violão* (which means not violin but guitar), and *coração*. Heart and song are rhymed in Spanish, too: *mi corazón* with *cancion*. For the most part, however, I found a poetic freshness in the songs, some of which had lyrics by the poet and playwright Vinicius de Moraes. And there was a wistful quality, often a pervading fatalism, as in Jobim's song *Vivo Sonhando*, which means "I live dreaming." He and I would eventually render it into English as *Dreamer*.

Later, when I knew a great many of them by heart, I came to a conclusion about the nature of these lyrics. I think they reflect an influence of the Portuguese folk song known as *fado*, which means "fate," and I have speculated that this in turn may be the consequence of the centuries of Arabic domination 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 to me that the lyric to *Desafinado* (by Newton Mendonça) was a joke, sly gentle fun poked at the criticism to which the bossa nova composers were subject from older singers and songwriters. The traditionalists said that these new songs were hard to sing. They said they were "crooked" and *Desafinado* does contain 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 told me. The whole bossa nova controversy reminds one of the bebop-vs-moldy figs animosity in jazz, from which in a way it was a descendant.

The Brazilian record companies were in the felicitous 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 in English.

I wrote the English lyric for *Corcovado* while crossing town on a bus. It is impossible, of course, to translate any song verbatim: it simply won't fit the music in the other language. What one has to do is to understand the song's essential spirit 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. Until I read an annotated translation of Turgenev's *Fathers and Sons*, with footnotes explaining the jokes that had been lost in translation, I had the unformulated but firm impression that Russian literature was humorless. Everyone who speaks Spanish as a first language tells me that *Don Quixote* is laugh-out-loud funny in Spanish; it isn't in English. And so wherever touches of humor were lost in *Desafinado*, I had to find little byplays in English to replace them.

In the next two or three days, I wrote English lyrics to both *Desafinado* and *Corcovado*. 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, but I couldn't make it work in English.)

Possibly in vain, I hope you'll weaken, O my love,
and forget those rigid rules that undermine my dream of
a life of love and music with someone who'll understand
that even though I may be out of tune
when I attempt to say how much I love you.
all that matters is the message that I bring,
which is: my dear one, I love you.

I smile now. Does anyone still own a Rolleiflex?

Corcovado presented problems, too, of course. The release contains a reference to a window looking on Corcovado, which means the hunchback. But an American audience would hardly know the name of that mountain, and the great panorama of the sea that the statue surveys. So I changed it. The Portuguese lyric is by Jobim, and it is one of his better ones. Again, it contains that fatalism that I find so common in Brazilian lyrics.

I noticed something odd about the Portuguese lyric. It rhymes throughout until the end, when it breaks the pattern. It is almost the opposite of Shakespeare's practice of writing iambic pentameter without rhyme until he reaches the end of a scene, which he signifies by a rhymed couplet. Why did Jobim do that? I was learning the tune on a small guitar I had purchased in La Paz, Bolivia. The song, which is in C, begins with a chord Jobim called D9/A. I've seen that written as Am6, with which it is enharmonic. But its function is that of a secondary dominant, and Jobim meant it that way. It is a very guitaristic song. The bass line descends chromatically from the A to the Em7 open-string chord, if you want to play it that way. It lies perfectly on the instrument.

But — and this is an important but — the song never fully resolves; it never goes to the tonic chord. It ends where it began, on D9/A. And this puts you back at the beginning; you have to start all over. The song is thus circular in shape, like Malcolm Lowery's novel *Under the Volcano*. It is a musical mobius band. I realized that Jobim broke rhyme at the end to make your ear yearn for a resolution; it perfectly fits the setup that occurs with that D9/A. And I decided to retain that effect in English. For all its seemingly simple beauty, that song is incredibly ingenious.

Quiet nights of quiet stars,
quiet chords from my guitar
floating on the silence
that surrounds us.

Quiet thoughts and quiet dreams.
quiet walks by quiet streams
and a window looking on
the mountains and the sea — how lovely.

This is where I want to be,
here with you so close to me
until the final flicker of life's ember.

(In Portuguese: ate o apagar da velha chama, which means: until the old flame goes out.)

I, who was lost and lonely,
believing life was only
a bitter, tragic joke,
have found with you
the meaning of existence,
O my love.

Jobim and I had lunch, or more likely, a couple of drinks, at the Copacabana Palace, one of the more luxurious hotels along what is unquestionably the most beautiful urban beach in the world. I still see the white tablecloths in sunlight that flowed in through big windows. I see that gorgeous crescent of sand, the girls in skimpy bikinis, the curved zig-zag of stones along that great sidewalk. I explained the lyrics to him carefully, probably in French. He was delighted with the lyrics and asked me to leave them with him.

At this point, I must violate the time sequence in order that you may know Jobim better. It is appropriate that at this time, you know his background. But the conversation I am about to quote did not happen then. It occurred twelve years later, in 1974, in the Sunset Marquee hotel in Los Angeles, when I was working on the lyrics for *Double Rainbow* with him. By then he 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."

"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 married my stepfather, and he 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, you know, pushed me up."

"Was he a musician?"

"No. An engineer. He's still alive. He has nothing to do with music." (This, remember, was in 1974.) "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, he played guitar; he taught me quite a bit of guitar, and he used to say that I was the only lyricist he'd ever worked with who knew his chord changes. I said, "You know, I've never met a Brazilian who didn't play the guitar." I was remembering a New York *Times* correspondent I had met in Rio, a Brazilian. I left my room for a minute and, when I returned, found him playing my guitar, and well.

"Yes," Jobim said. "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, German. The harmonica 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 with harmonicas. We made arrangements. We would distribute the voicings. It was nice.

"I had a tremendous fight, my wife and I." He was referring to his first wife, Tereza. She was in the bedroom of the hotel suite as we were talking. "She was then a kid," he said. "I went to architecture school because I wanted to marry her, and so I should be somebody respectable. Not a musician. I should be a doctor or something. In Brazil, you call doctor an engineer. If you are an engineer they will call you Dr. Something. I went to architecture 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.

"I started to play in nightclubs and in bars, *boites*, as they called them. For years, you know, I played this nightlife very heavy, for dancing. Playing piano.

"I tried to compose. I tried to write. But I would never show anything to anyone. I had a drawer full of songs. Finally I got to the radio and record companies. I used to write down the melodies that composers would write by ear. I was a copyist. I used to write down the Carnaval melodies."

Carnaval, as surely everyone knows, is that celebration in February, just before mardi gras, when the streets of Rio go mad with costumed dancers. Rio is unique among the world's cities in that the rich do not live on the high ground and the poor on the lowlands, as in Montreal and Hong Kong. In Rio it is just the opposite. The rich live in glorious houses and apartments at sea level; the poor live in the *favelas*, as the slums are called, that sprawl up its glorious hills. The poverty is grinding and terrible, and there is a shortage of water. Despite all this hardship, residents of these neighborhoods — mostly black — will work for a year making costumes for Carnaval, often spending much of year's income on them. Somehow they find it worth it, and when Carnaval at last comes, there is fabulous dancing to what the Brazilians call *escola de samba*, school of samba. The word is the cognate of the French école. The acute e indicates there was once an s in the word in French. The French dropped the s, we dropped the e. Thus school, école, escola, and the Spanish escuela are essentially the same word, descendants of the latin schola. Jobim and I would spend all sorts of time discussing the cognates of various languages.

"Carnaval is not any more what it used to be," he said that day. "It's changed a lot. Brazil is industrial and coffee isn't any more the first income. But Carnaval was a big thing. *Escola de samba* the street samba. Everything was very important.

"Also the making of 78s. I mean records. Records that would have a short life. It was just a hit, a Carnaval hit. And some of them are good, well done. And it was a big thing. The melodies, and the samba and the *samba cancão*, the slower songs. They're called *mediano*. In other words, mid-year music, every music that is not played during the carnival.

"Before Carnaval, let's say from December, everybody was already composing and recording for the coming Carnaval in February. Lots of activity in January. And then in February, Carnaval would come and take over. You wouldn't listen a mid-year song any more. Radio was very important, before TV. Radio was the thing, and all the radios were playing the Carnaval songs. And I used to be a piano player for a record company.

"And later I moved to Odeon. I became the a&r man for Odeon. By then I had a lot of songs already. And singers started to record them. And I started to *show* them, which I didn't before. I was very timid, very shy, very scared. I had lots of sambas. I

wrote some scores for movies, and finally João Gilberto came. And I arranged a record for him. I was basically, before being a songwriter, an arranger. I had the attaché suitcase, going downtown every day to record, mainly with singers, and, how do you say, some instrumentalists.

"Then an important fact in my life: I met Vinicius de Moraes." The Brazilians pronounce it: Vee-nee-syuss duh Mo-rah-ees, stress in both names on the second syllable.) "He was a poet, a composer. At the time he was a diplomat. But mainly a poet. He had had several books of poetry published, good poetry. He was a man educated at Oxford. He was with the foreign service in Paris."

"Wasn't he at UNESCO for a time?"

"UNESCO. He's been around. He was at Strassbourg.

"He had this idea of writing the *Black Orpheus*. Then he arrived Brazil. He had been for a long time abroad. He had that deep nostalgia . . . ."

"*Saudade*," I interjected, laughing, knowing it was the word he really wanted.

One of the first things you learn in Brazil is that the word *saudade* is ubiquitous and untranslatable. It is pronounced sow-DAH-djee. It means, roughly, longing, yearning, sadness, something akin to what we mean by *homesick*.

"Yes, *saudade*. Vinicius had the script already made. The play, for the theater. He was looking for a musician. Someone introduced me to him. We started to do good things. In '56, I think, we went to the Municipal Theater, and we did *Orfeu Negro* for the stage. It was a big thing there. Local, but big. All the society came. We did about two weeks in the Municipal. Then we went to a popular theater, and we did it for two months, the scenery made by Oscar Niemeyer, the famous Brazilian architect.

"Later the French came and decided to produce *L'Orphé Noir*."

The producer was Sacha Godine, the director Marcel Camus. Filmed on location, the picture made brilliant use of the costumes d dance of Carnaval and of the stunning scenery of Rio de Janeiro, even the *favelas*. The film hewed closely to the Moraes play, in which the Greek legend of Orpheus and Euridyce is played out as the tale of a girl who falls in love with a streetcar conductor. They are of course parallels to the lovers of the Greek legend. Another man falls jealously in love with her and follows her in the costume of Death. The film, which contained music by Jobim and Luiz Bonfa, was released in 1959 and became an international hit, eventually winning an Academy Award as best foreign film.

"We worked on the film. I wrote new songs. Luiz Bonfa wrote the famous *Manhã de Carnaval*. And we worked together. And then the film became very famous and got awards all over the world. And in Brazil I stopped being an unknown. They started to know my name, and they would say Mr. Jobim wrote the music for *Black Orpheus*. It brought a lot of publicity for Luiz Bonfa, for Vinicius, and for me.

"Then João Gilberto came from Bahia in the north. The north is hot. The south is more temperate. So. João Gilberto asked me to make a record with him. And in this record he recorded many of my songs, and it became famous. At first nobody wanted to make a record with him. They thought it was not commercial, you know, the old thing.

"Finally we got permission to make a 78, the old 78s. We did it, and it was a hit. *Chega de Saudade* and *Bim Bom*." It is pronounced *shay-ga* and it means "enough".

"Then João Gilberto got the permission to make an album. So we did his first album." That was in 1958. "And the second. And the third. João Gilberto became a very famous man in Brazil. And in '62, you came down and I met you."

When the first bossa nova records were heard in the United States, it was bruited about that this music had been influenced by records made in California in the mid-1950s by saxophonist and flutist Bud Shank and Brazilian guitarist Laurindo Almeida. This was ardently denied by the devotees of hard bop in the east: west coast jazz was so patently effete that this could not possibly be.

But according to Jobim, João Gilberto, and many others, this was indeed the case. Even Bud Shank thought it was untrue. "The Brazilians didn't need us," he told me some time ago.

But trumpeter Claudio Roditi, born in Rio de Janeiro May 28, 1946, is yet another Brazilian musician who confirms this. Claudio, who now lives in Brooklyn, remembers growing up on the Jobim records and listening to west coast jazz records on the World Pacific label. One of the musicians he listened to, as did Jobim and Gilberto, was Gerry Mulligan. In 1959, Claudio said, the Brazilian label called Musidisc was issuing the World Pacific records in Brazil.

"Everybody was into west coast jazz then," he said (Jazzletter, October 1992). "These records were issued by Musidisc there. Any other stuff would be imported and harder to find. That's why west coast jazz influenced the bossa nova people that much. I am quite sure that Chet Baker was an influence. The arrangements of the period all sound as if they were influenced by Bud Shank or Gerry Mulligan or those cats. And mainly Mulligan."

One of the influences was Barney Kessel, especially through a recording he made with Julie London titled *Julie Is Her Name*. Such Brazilian guitarists as Roberto Menescal, Carlos Lyra, and Baden Powell have attested to this. In a book titled *Musica Popular Brasileira* (Brazilian Popular Music, obviously), Menescal said, "At the time I started to buy records, I ended up liking Brubeck, Gerry Mulligan, Chet Baker. Shorty Rogers . . . influenced our music so much . . . . Tom (Jobim) already used to do almost everything that we do today. Until that record by Barney Kessel appeared. This record really opened our eyes to harmony."

Carlos Lyra said, "The sound of jazz is what was heard by us, Tom, Johnny Alf, by me, by Menescal, by Ronaldo Boscoli."

Johnny Alf said, "In the beginning, Lennie Tristano, Lee Konitz, and Charlie Parker. I heard a lot of Billy Bauer, the King Cole Trio, Stan Kenton, Billie Holiday."

Baden Powell said, "From fifteen to nineteen I only played jazz.

At the time I was crazy about Shorty Rogers. The guitarists were Barney Kessel and Les Paul . . . . I went to speak to Barney in Germany, crazy to meet him. I told him, 'I am the greatest fan you have.' He died laughing and said, 'I am the one who is your fan, you know.' I told him then about his recording with Julie London . . . . I told him that he was adored by all guitarists in Brazil, and he was happy, because he is a simple guy."

Jobim, late in his life, tended to minimize the American influence. He told an interviewer that Debussy and Villa-Lobos were very strong influences on him. He continued:

"As for jazz, real jazz, I never had much access. What we listened to here were those big bands. Real jazz here was something for collectors, for rich playboy types . . . ." (This was almost certainly a slap at the millionaire coffee heir and jazz buff George Guinley. He wore platform heels, paraded his young girls, and was loathed by every Brazilian musician I ever met.)

"I'm not much of a connoisseur of jazz," Jobim continued. Maybe. But he liked working with American jazzmen such as Ron Carter and Urbie Green. "Later on, I saw that purists here were saying that bossa nova was a copy of American jazz. When these people would say bossa nova's harmony was based on jazz, I thought it was funny because this same harmony already existed in Debussy. No way was it American. To say a ninth chord is an American invention is absurd. These altered eleventh and thirteenth chords, with all these added notes, you can't say they're an American invention. This kind of thing is as much South American as it is North American. Americans took to bossa nova because they thought it was interesting. If it was a mere copy of jazz, they wouldn't be interested. They're tired of copies of jazz. There's Swedish jazz, French jazz, German jazz — Germans are full of jazz.

"Look, what swings is in the United States, in Cuba, in Brazil. These are places that swing. All the rest is waltzes — with all due respect to the Austrians. There are interesting rhythms in places like Chile and Mexico, but it's not the same essence that we have — the black influence mixed with the white influence. It's a question of nomenclature. Latin jazz, Brazilian jazz, soon you don't know what you're talking about any more . . . . We need to free Brazil from these categories. I faced enormous prejudices. I'd play a ninth chord and people would say, 'Look, Tom's playing bebop.'"

He was quite right, of course, that this kind of harmony was not an American invention. But what he told that interviewer is at variance with what he told me in earlier years, particularly about the influence of Mulligan. A simple example: Roberto Menescal's charming *O Barquinho* is based on the chord changes of Ralph Burns' *Early Autumn*. And the chart on it in the João Gilberto record, which I have always assumed Jobim wrote, sounds like the Stan Kenton band.

And Dori Caymmi (guitarist, arranger, composer, and son of Dorival Caymmi), said: "Shorty Rogers for me was the inventor of bossa nova because he played the way João and Tom played."

All of this raises some interesting points. Mulligan has recounted that in the late 1940s, he and such associates as John Lewis and John Carisi, who met regularly in the apartment of Gil Evans in New York, were trying to achieve with a small group the calm lyricism of the Claude Thornhill orchestra, of which he, Gil, and Lee Konitz, among others, were alumni. When Miles Davis got a record contract for them with Capitol, the group became known as his, and the music, in later hindsight, as the Birth of the Cool. Mulligan's own subsequent records, made in California with both a tentet and later a quartet, were issued on World Pacific, and were among those, according to Roditi, that became available in Brazil. In that case, one is forced to reflect that João Gilberto's soft vibratoless singing may have been influenced by that of Chet Baker. It was also influenced — and he told me this long ago — by the French singer from Martinique, Henri Salvador, as well as some earlier Brazilian singers. The very concept of the sound of the Thornhill band was Thornhill's own, according to both Gil Evans and Gerry Mulligan. And so in the longer genealogy, one is forced to conclude that Claude Thornhill was one of the important influences on bossa nova.

As for Shorty Rogers, he came from a somewhat different direction. Shorty was married to Red Norvo's sister. Shorty, a product of the famous High School of Music and Art in New York, joined Red's group when he was still in his teens. Red at that time was playing xylophone, an unamplified wooden instrument of very low volume. Thus the whole group had to be scaled down to a kind of general pianissimo to balance with it. Shorty said that when he settled in California, he tried to continue in that softer style. And he, along with Mulligan, became one of the formative influences on west coast jazz and, thus, incredibly, on Brazilian music. It is possible, even likely, that Shorty, who died about the same Jobim did, never knew of his influence in Brazil.

Richard Bock produced those early west coast jazz records. I read recently that he was one of the early champions of bossa nova. Not so. In my excitement about the music I was discovering, I telephoned Dick from Rio de Janeiro. He knew nothing about the movement and wasn't even very interested. He missed the boat on the movement. The man who didn't miss it was Creed Taylor.

(To be continued)

Bravo, Somebody

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