

## "Antonio Carlos Jobim--Guitar Player"

by Brian Hodel

Antonio Carlos Jobim has always maintained an intimate relationship with the guitar. While he would never claim to be a virtuoso performer, all the brilliance and sophistication of his musical gifts are revealed when he composes on the instrument, or plays through the rich chordal accompaniments to any of his more than 30 internationally acclaimed hits.

The composer of "Deasfinado", "The Girl from Ipanema", and "Wave" has been a major influence on other guitarists who can be called virtuosic. His music, which according to jazz great Herb Ellis "fits so beautifully on the guitar", is central to the repertoires of players like Ellis, Charlie Byrd and Carlos Barbosa-Lima. Beyond that, Jobim ranks with Cole Porter and Johnny Mercer as one of the composers most recorded by jazz artists.

From a more technical standpoint, not only have this Brazilian's harmonic innovations greatly enriched the world's popular music, but he is responsible for a number of unusual chords that evolved into the distinctive sound called "bossa nova guitar". Jobim's guitar accompaniments on his many recordings display a mastery of dissonance and chromaticism that combines with impeccable "Brazilian swing" to epitomize the style.

Born in Rio de Janeiro in 1927, Jobim was brought up in a musical environment. His mother directed a small music school located at their home in Ipanema, and one of his uncles was a guitarist who had studied with the great teacher Isaias Savio. But although he began taking piano lessons at fourteen, young Jobim was infinitely more interested in athletics and girls. Ironically "youthful folly" was responsible for his becoming a musician at all.

"I was eighteen at the time", he says, "so handsome and strong. A group of us were making a human pyramid to impress the girls. It collapsed and I painfully injured my back. Because I could not move around much while I was recuperating, I spent hours seated in front of my mother's Beckstein piano in our garage, experimenting with harmony, new sounds. It was marvelous."

Enthused with the idea of becoming a concert pianist, Jobim began extensive classical training, studying with excellent teachers such as Lucia Branco and Tomas Deran.

"I worked on all the standard exercises", he says, "scales, arpeggios, octaves--and every day I played Chopin, Liszt, Schuman, Beethoven, and Brahms. But I was a bit too old to become a concertist. I should have started when I was five or six."

This realization led him to play popular music with little amateur groups around Rio. The music they performed consisted of Brazilian styles popular at the time--choros and sambas--and American swing jazz. These two influences later became main ingredients in the bossa nova.

A teacher who bears much of the responsibility for Jobim's musical sophistication is Joachim Karlreuter, the German atonal composer who taught many of Brazil's best musicians. Jobim's long time association with him resulted in what Jobim calls his "battle with Mother Tonic"--characterized by songs like "Desafinado"--where the modulations and harmonic textures blur the tonal center.

Another striking aspect of Jobim's composing and performing is the deadly accuracy of his ear. I once had the pleasure of watching him arrange some of his pieces for solo and duo classical guitar in co-operation with Carlos Barbosa-Lima. Jobim would direct Barbosa-Lima to a harmonic voice or contrapuntal line he wanted in the arrangement either by singing it or playing it on another guitar. Jobim's often complex ideas came quickly and precisely,



with little "fishing around" for the notes.

A former award-winning arranger, orchestrator, and conductor in Brazilian television, Jobim can read scores at sight without an instrument, and speaks of the theoretical aspects of his work as would Leonard Bernstein or Andre Previn. Yet his ear training was not received in a classroom, but as a professional transcriber--a practice he recommends.

"When Carnaval time came in Rio, the publishing houses would give me the records with all the Carnaval songs, and I was paid to write out the lead sheets. After doing so much of that I got so I could just listen and write them down without an instrument."

Jobim studied architecture in his early 20's, but having recently married he had to drop out of school in his first year to support his family. He began performing as a pianist in bars. It was not work he enjoyed, playing popular boleros and tangos hours on end, and it was often dangerous. He was nearly killed once in a shoot-out between customers. Such experiences helped convince him to concentrate on composing his own music rather than performing other people's.

"Although I had a few local hits in the early fifties", he says, "my first big break was co-writing the score for the film "Black Orpheus". It won over 100 awards, including the 1959 Gold Palm at Cannes and the Academy Award for 'Best Foreign Film'. After that the reporters began arriving and the photographers began shooting".

That soundtrack, a collaborative effort between Jobim and Luiz Bonfá, marked the transition from the old style of Brazilian popular music to the bossa nova. But "Black Orpheus'" international success was only a hint of things to come.

Two excellent guitarists, Joao Gilberto and Charlie Byrd, were keys to Jobim's impending spectacular success. Gilberto, a talented young musician from northeastern Brazil,

had attracted an enthusiastic following of young jazz-influenced musicians in Rio. Jobim produced <sup>Gilberto's</sup> first records, Bim Bam, and Chega de Saudade, two of the earliest bossa novas to achieve a modicum of commercial success in Brazil.

The record companies began to take notice, but they were unsure of the marketability of this novel new combination of samba and modern jazz.

Says Jobim: "They would listen to my songs and say: 'Sure Antonio, it sounds nice. But it's much too sophisticated for the public. You should make it simpler'".

In fact, the bossa nova didn't achieve significant success in Brazil until it became popular in the United States. But it did attract many of Rio's finest musicians, including Baden Powell, Roberto Menescal, and Sergio Mendes--all of whom later became major contributors to the style.

Jobim clears up some of the confusion surrounding the early development of the bossa nova:

"It was originally called 'cool samba' because of the influence of cool jazz that we had at the time, probably from Jerry Mulligan, Shorty Rogers, Chet Baker--all those guys from 'the coast', (The American 'West Coast School of Cool Jazz').

"But the bossa nova was not designed on purpose and we never imagined it would ever come to the United States. We were rather young, naive guys. We felt that the popular samba was too crowded, too busy. It was so full of percussion instruments that it made a kind of continuous roar, like the sea.

"Then along came Joao Gilberto, this incredible young talent, with this fascinating style of guitar accompaniment, these specific rhythms. This beat comes from the tamborim, and instrument in the Escolas de Samba (Carnaval marching societies). So Joao and I and the others picked up this tamborim beat and did this kind of 'cool samba' which was later called bossa nova."



Charlie Byrd, who considers Jobim "the best composer of popular music of the second half of the Twentieth Century", first heard his music while on a U.S. State Department tour of Latin America in 1960.

"Someone I met in Caraca on that tour had some records of Jobim's music played by Joao Gilberto," says the American guitarist. "I loved it".

In 1962 Byrd convinced alto saxophonist Stan Getz and Verve Record's producer Creed Taylor to record the album "Jazz ~~and~~ Samba" (V-8432). The song "Desafinado" from the record became the surprise hit of the year, making the Top Ten and selling over a million-and-a-half copies.

There was probably never a song less likely to become a hit in either ~~the~~ <sup>the Brazilian</sup> or ~~the~~ US markets than "Desafinado". The Portuguese lyric is as long, complicated, and abstract as the song's meandering melody and chord progression. It has a complex form that pauses on all the most dissonant intervals. In fact, Jobim claims that neither Gilberto in his recording, nor Byrd and Getz in theirs, got it completely right.

Verve, enthused by the success of "Jazz ~~and~~ Samba", decided to match Getz with Joao Gilberto (and Jobim on piano) for the 1963 album "Getz/Gilberto" (V6-8545). The record featured six Jobim originals.

Joao Gilberto's wife, Astrud, made her unplanned recording debut on the session singing Norman Gimbel's English lyric for "The Girl from Ipanema". The enormous success of that song--it was the NARA "Song of the Year" for 1963--established both Getz and Astrud Gilberto as pop stars, and made Jobim the hottest composer in popular music.

From then on the hits flowed in quick succession: "Corcovado" ("Quiet Nights of Quiet Stars"), "Chega de Saudade" ("No More Blues"), "One Note Samba", "Someone to Light Up My Life", "Meditation", "Insensatez" ("How Insensitive"), "Dindi", "Triste", "Stone Flower", "Wave", "The Waters of March", and more.

Jobim's influence was quickly felt throughout the recording industry. Bossa nova became a "buzz word" and the studios in Los Angeles and New York began cranking out "bossa nova" recordings by every artist imaginable.

Downbeat, which reviewed many of these efforts, consistently praised records by Brazilian artists such as Jobim, Bonfa, and Gilberto; but panned many ill-advised attempts at the style by American jazz musicians who had not yet fully absorbed the new music.

In the decade from the mid-1960's to mid-1970's, Jobim became an important recording artist with great popularity as a singer, pianist, and guitarist among both jazz and pop listeners. He worked with great side-men such as Grady Tate and Airto on drums; Ron Carter and Bob Cranshaw on bass; Bucky Pizzareli and Oscar Castro-Neves on guitar. Critic Pete Welding once lamented he had but five stars to award one of Jobim's albums.

There are several ways to judge the importance of a composer. "Staying power" is one of them. The large number of recordings of Jobim songs by artists as diverse as Pat Martino, Oscar Peterson, and Frank Sinatra have made them classics. "Desafinado" alone has been recorded 350 times and can be found in 35 music books. Five Jobim compositions have received BMI "Million Performance" awards placing him, according to Stanly Carton, BMI's head of writer relations, "among the top five most recorded BMI composers in the US. He's in the exclusive company of Paul Simon, Lennon-McCartney, Kris Kristofferson, and Norman Gimbel."

Aside from that impressive record, Jobim's style has had a lasting effect on popular music as a whole. His influence can be felt not only in the work of kindred composers such as Michel Legrande and Burt Bacharach, but among the younger generation--Billy Joel, ("I Love You Just the Way You Are"), and Stevie Wonder, ("You Are the Sunshine of My Life" and "My Cherie Amour"). In musical terms



this influence consists of not only the bossa nova rhythm, but his ingenious chord progressions, chord structures, and melodies.

"I consider myself a brother of those guys like George Gershwin and Johnny Mercer", says Jobim. He is, without doubt, the main representative of musical sophistication in contemporary popular music.

Although the bossa nova went out of commercial vogue in the mid-1970's, Jobim has had continued success in Europe and Brazil, and his music has grown in many new directions. In some cases it has become highly classical, (exemplified by some of the pieces on the LP's "Antonio Carlos Jobim", MCA-350; and "Urubu", Warner Bros., BS 2928). In others he has "returned to Mother Tonic" writing songs that are much simpler in nature.

Today Jobim is an active composer of film scores--he's just done the music for the MGM film "Gabriella" which stars Marcelo Mastrioni--and he won awards in 1982 for Brazil's "Best Song" ("Luiza"), and as "Best Composer".

During the past year, Jobim's life long fascination with the guitar has begun to dominate his activities. Carlos Barbosa-Lima was the catalyst.

"Carlos called me last year when I was in New York and said he had arranged several of my songs for solo guitar. I invited him over. When I heard his playing I knew to whom I was talking. He is a brujo of the guitar!"

The co-arranging project led to the recording of "Carlos Barbosa-Lima Plays the Music of Antonio Carlos Jobim and George Gershwin" (Concord Concerto, CC2005), which has received wide critical acclaim. Subsequent meetings between the two have led to more arrangements of Jobim songs for one or two classical guitars. Their work sessions are exhilarating.

According to Jobim: "To me working with Carlos is like magic because it is an escape to quality. It is so

difficult for Brazil to build one Carlos Barbosa-Lima. It takes so many coffee beans and policemen, changes of government--do you know what I'm driving at? A lot of sweat. But as Stravinsky said, 'Music is 5% inspiration and 95% perspiration.'"

And according to Barbosa-Lima: "Arranging Jobim's music for the classical guitar is not just transcribing the left and right hands of the piano. Jobim has a profound understanding of the guitar, and we work together developing the ideas that go into the arrangements. The best ideas come very quickly, right off the top of our heads. At certain moments I felt myself really somewhere else."

It is not surprising that Jobim has returned to classical music and given greater emphasis to the guitar. Perhaps a third of his best known songs were written on the instrument, and his knowledge of the fret board and all the harmonic and contrapuntal possibilities is impressive.

"I do not feel limited composing on the guitar", he says. "All the things I learned on the piano I transferred to the guitar. One is actually less limited on the guitar because of all the possibilities for harmonics and microtones."

Jobim's next guitar project is bound to cause great interest among guitar enthusiasts. He is seriously considering writing a concerto for guitar and orchestra.

"Carlos suggested it", he says. "It's a dangerous idea, it's a challenge, and it's very tempting. In terms of fulfilling some of my early aspirations in classical music, it is one of my most legitimate desires--something from the soul. Carlos would be the ideal interpreter."

Let's all hope "Carlos Barbosa-Lima plays Jobim's First Concerto for Guitar and Orchestra" will soon be available in record stores.



Concert Review - Brian Hodel

Antonio Carlos Jobim, Carnegie Hall, March 29 and 30  
Accompanied by Danilo Caymmi, Flutes and Vocals; Jaques Morelenbaum, Cello; Paulo Jobim, Guitar; Tiao Neto, Electric Bass; Paulinho Braga, Drums; Ana Lontra Jobim, Vocals; Elizabeth Jobim, Vocals; Maucha Adnet, Vocals; Paula Morelenbaum, Vocals; and Simone Caymmi, Vocals.

Once asked to name the principle element of his music, Antonio Carlos Jobim unflinchingly replied neither harmony, melody, nor rhythm, but, "sincerity". His first New York appearance in 23 years proved just how enduring music written from the heart can be. It also showed Jobim's skill as an arranger. Taking a fresh approach to many of his old standards, he expanded his contrapuntal style of piano accompaniment into a cleverly conceived chamber ensemble.

Fare for the evening was an even mixture of the old and new, drawn from the Brazilian composer's catalog of nearly thirty international hits. "Corcovado", "The Girl from Ipanema", and "Desafinado" were there, along with the more recently composed, but no less appealing "Wave", "Aguas de Marco", "Luiza" and several more. The ensemble deserves special mention both for its membership and instrumentation. Jobim, playing piano, placed himself at the center of a hand-picked group that synthesized three of Brazil's best-known musical families. The element that both unified and diversified the ensemble was the cello, in the refined hands of Jaques Morelenbaum, son of one of Brazil's foremost conductors. It played several roles: reinforcing the usually syncopated, often chromatic counterpoint that is an organic part of Jobim's music, harmonizing liltily with the flute, and strengthening bass lines with its rich, dignified color. In a rhythm section of drums, bass, piano, and guitar, Jobim's son, Paulo, contributed a steady pulse

in the guitar accompaniment style called batida de violao, for which Joao Gilberto and Luiz Bonfá are well-known. A flawless five-voice female chorus sang mostly in unison, soaring above the familiar melodies in ethereal counterpoint.

The group provided taut orchestration for music that goes far beyond the standard harmonic formulas and pasted-on melodies that much popular romantic music amounts to. Jobim's songs are so well structured that most of them would be nobly appealing arranged for piano solo on up to a large chamber orchestra. All the elements of a rich listening experience are there, and this particular ensemble showed-off Jobim's ability to create drama by subtle means, his ingenuity at coaxing the maximum orchestral effect from a small group. It is something he's an old hand at.

The most interesting instrument on stage was the composer's voice. From a strictly professional standpoint, Jobim's baritone has a great deal of warmth, but it lacks control. In the English lyric to his song, "Desafinado", he sang: "I wish I had an ear like yours, a voice that would behave. All I have is feeling and a voice God gave." But from a communicative standpoint, Jobim's sometimes slightly out of tune singing and his textural inconsistencies through the vocal registers are a trademark that personalized his performance. He doesn't pretend to be a professional singer, and if he ever came out sounding like Johnny Mathis, it would surely detract.

Jobim's four solo numbers were a special treat for the nearly sold-out, international audience. For me, the high point of the concert was his rubato rendering of "Luiza". The piano-vocal format gets no more intimate than that. He also gave the "world premier" of a witty "Chansonq", with an English lyric of his own reminiscent



of the jazz vocal humor of Mose Allison, Bob Dorough, and Dave Frishberg. (The song's tri-lingual antics cut a swath through sexy pince-nez, Brazilian beer, and a scotch whisky's bouquet - "I really feel touche.") Paulo Jobim's "Samba do Soho" proved the creative spark is in the genes. The bouncing, up-tempo samba with an extremely attractive melody and English lyric drew a strong reaction from the audience. In a concert of short pieces, a medley from the recent film, "Gabriella" was the most ambitious event of the evening. "Gabriella's Love Theme", a lush, flowing song, built up and progressed into "Stone Flower", a pungent piece carved in the jagged rhythms of the Brazilian Northeast. The dramatics were handled by drums, bass, and cello, which supported the melody with a thrilling ostinato.

It was a delight to hear Antonio Carlos Jobim put sensuous flesh on the bones of songs we only get to hear these days in the muzak of banks and dentists' offices. Both performances were smashingly successful, and I hope this encourages "Mr. Bim" to grace us with his presence more often.