

DDD Review

PERFORMANCE SOUND QUALITY

Lula Bonfá: *Non-Stop to Brazil*
Chesky JD29 (DDD) 1989 (89)
Disc time: 46:55

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Ana Caram: *Rio After Dark*
Chesky JD28 (DDD) 1989 (89)
Disc time: 58:48

Bossa nova has amazing resiliency. Over the years it has been twisted, rocked, socked, mauled, misused, and played to the brink of death. Yet it always bounces back. And when it does, it refreshes the heart, mind, and soul like no other musical style.

The bossa beat, propelled by Stan Getz & Charlie Byrd's *Jazz Samba* LP, hit the U.S. in the early '60s. For the next few years, there was hardly a jazz or mainstream pop performer who didn't try to capitalize on the fad, for better or for worse.

But the blending of samba and jazz began some years before Getz and Byrd. Bossa nova's '50s roots were not only in Brazil among musicians and composers like Antonio Carlos Jobim, Baden Powell, and Luis Bonfá, but also in some recordings made in the U.S. by

jazz altoist Dud Shank and Brazilian guitarist Laurindo Almeida.

The year 1959 was critical for bossa nova as an international musical phenomenon. That year, *Black Orpheus* won a Cannes Film Festival award. Since music is a major part of the Orpheus legend, it was only natural that music played a major part in the film. Bonfá composed the soundtrack music, and two of the songs ("Manha de Carnaval" and "Samba de Orfeu") became immediate hits.

Bonfá reprises both of those pieces on *Non-Stop to Brazil* and complements them with 13 other short works. All are based on Brazilian rhythms and melodic motifs. This is Bonfá at his most natural and folklike. He strums, pats, plucks, and strokes his guitar to produce an astounding variety of sounds. He plays without accompaniment on a few tunes, but generally enjoys some discreet percussion support from a Brazilian named Café. Guitarist Gene Bertocini slips in on three tracks.

You can almost see Bonfá just left of center, sitting on a stool that creaks occasionally as he rocks and sways with the music. The excellent recording makes him an almost palpable reality. This is one of the most natural-sounding CDs I've ever heard. Even if the music wasn't so marvelously ingratiating, the disc would be worth owning just for the fun of hearing how convincingly real recorded sound can be.

Chesky's other Brazilian effort, *Rio After Dark*, featuring vocalist Ana Caram, is equally well-recorded and the music reaches heights that almost match Bonfá's. Caram reminds many listeners of Astrud Gilberto, she has a much stronger voice and a feistier rhythmic sense. Her percussive vocal on "Alagoas" is solidly on the beat and unabashedly erotic.

The backup band—Caram on guitar, Gene Finck on bass, Café on percussion—plays a few tracks either sax (Paquito D'Rivera) or flute (Steve Sacks)—produces a certain feel and sound. On "Meditation" (written by Like December), the percussionists drop out and players sit out and Jobim adds his piano voice to the ensemble. His singing is slightly quavery, but sincere and ingratiating. His vocalization blends nicely with Caram's purer tone.

One of the disc's most entertaining challenges is keeping up with Caram's Portuguese patter song "O Que Veir Eu Traco." It's like Gilbert & Sullivan transported from London to Rio. There's a particularly tasty and well-recorded clarinet solo on this track.

Rio After Dark would be a perfect world if Caram didn't occasionally feel out of place in her struggle with English lyrics on Brazilian songs. Translations are useful for American singers who want easier access to the tunes. But listen to Caram's two choruses of "Meditation" and compare the one in English with the other one in Portuguese. The melody, the rhythm, and the emotional content are stronger when Caram delivers them in her native idiom.

—Tom Kravits