

BRAZILIAN

BY MARK HOLSTON

"NOW THE WORD FROM LONDON," begins a recent letter from Brazilian critic and producer Arnaldo De Souteiro with an air of urgency reminiscent of Edward R. Murrow's dispatches during the height of World War II. "The British are completely in love with Brazilian music from the mid-'60s to the mid-'70s." To support his claim, my friend cites a long list of album titles guaranteed to quicken the pulse of any Brazilophile who has been following the music since "The Girl From Ipanema" days.

Yes, the bossa nova, that frothy concoction of light samba-rooted rhythms and cool jazz airs, is enjoying a renaissance of global interest not unlike the neo-bop craze of recent years. From the release of new recordings by many of the genre's masters to the emergence of new talent that may have been in diapers when bossa was born, this is an exciting time for fans of the classic Brazilian jazz samba blend.

Significantly, the music of the father figure of the movement, singer/guitarist

João Gilberto, continues to define the essence of the style. *Ao Vivo* (Sony Latin Jazz), the bossa guru's first album since 1991's heavily orchestrated *João* (Verve), captures Gilberto in a solo live recording, with only his revolutionary guitar technique as accompaniment. A kind of "greatest hits" package, the album includes 18 songs that range from Dorival Caymmi's "Rosa Morena" to the Italian ballad "Estate" and a generous sampling of works by the late Antonio Carlos Jobim, co-creator of the bossa nova and Gilberto's most important collaborator.

"João's arrival in Rio really shook things up," Jobim once commented, describing Gilberto's impact on the scene in the late 1950s. "Later on, bossa nova became a standard style, pretty boring, everybody playing it the same way in Brazil, in America, in Europe. Which was never João's case. His guitar style is linked to what he is singing. It functions as a counterpoint, something that swings." On *Ao Vivo* the 63-year-old Gilberto works his timeless magic once again in a session both intimate and electrifying.

Ana Caram, the silken-voiced bossa goddess whose vocal style is out of the Astrud Gilberto school of cool understatement, has crafted an album that's pure bossa all the way, from the choice of a classic repertoire from the '60s to the smallest details of typography, photography, layout, and color scheme of the CD booklet. Every nuance of the bossa era, musical and visual, has been lovingly captured on *Bossa Nova* (Chesky).

"World music has become a little limited today," Caram says, "and I think



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people are more open to the beautiful melodies, harmonies, and lyrics of the bossa nova." Just as the gentle bossa caused quite a ripple in the dominant rock scene in the early 1960s, Caram, among others, senses that the time is once again ripe for a heightened interest in the music. "I think some of the great things of the past need to be rescued,"

she states. "Bossa nova is one of them. And I have to sing what I believe."

Singled out for her sweet, breathy treatment are such standards as "Summer Samba" and "The Girl From Ipanema," which she and the band nurse along at an uncommonly slow tempo, a refreshing treatment for the well-known Antonio Carlos Jobim standard. Particularly attractive are her takes of "Brigas, Nucas Mais," a seldom-heard masterpiece by the late Jobim, and his equally obscure but melodically entrancing "Look to the Sky," which she sings in wordless unison with the date's arranger, flutist Steve Sacks. Guitarist Romero Lubambo, drummer Duduka Da Fonseca, and bassist David Finck are the perfect session mates, as is pianist Cliff Korman, whose Jobim-esque piano completes the mood. *Bossa Nova* is a retro gem.

Similar in character is *Isso E Bossa Nova* (EMI) by vocalist Lella Pinheiro, an import available through Brazil CDs (call 617-524-5030 for a catalogue with this and other marvelous hard-to-find titles). *Isso* is a tribute to João Gilberto, featuring many of the songs he popularized in the early 1960s. The production is the very definition of bossa chic, with lustrous arrangements for a large, string-laden ensemble and several tracks of bubbly combo backing, fashioned by



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