

# Bossa Nova as Existential Turn: No more blues!

## Bossa Nova como virada existencial: Chega de saudade!

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### ABSTRACT

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The article approaches Bossa Nova as an experience of resignification at the existential and religious level, focusing primarily on the song *Chega de saudade* (No more blues), by Tom Jobim and Vinicius de Moraes. Opinions and testimonies are listed, in order to attest to the centrality of this song for Bossa Nova and Brazilian Popular Music. *Chega de saudade* catalyzes aspirations, like a horizon of happiness. The constitution and main features of the Bossanovista movement are discussed, as well as the album *Chega de saudade*, by João Gilberto. The musical elements of the song (harmony, rhythm, melody, timbre, interpretation, lyrics, etc.) are treated in their dimension of meaning, as an aesthetic-religious experience. Finally, the national and international repercussion of the Bossanovista movement is approached.

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**Keywords:** music and religion; Bossa nova; *Chega de saudade*; religious experience.

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### RESUMO

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O artigo aborda a Bossa Nova como experiência de ressignificação de nível existencial e religioso, tendo como foco primeiro a canção *Chega de saudade*, de Tom Jobim e Vinicius de Moraes. Opiniões e testemunhos são elencados, no sentido de atestar a centralidade desta canção para a Bossa Nova e a música popular brasileira. *Chega de saudade* catalisa aspirações, como um horizonte de felicidade. Discute-se a constituição e os principais traços do movimento bossanovista, bem como do álbum *Chega de saudade*, de João Gilberto. Os elementos musicais da canção (harmonia, ritmo, melodia, timbre, interpretação, letra, etc.) são tratados em sua dimensão de sentido, enquanto experiência estético-religiosa. Aborda-se, por fim, a repercussão nacional e internacional do movimento bossanovista.

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**Palavras-chave:** Música e religião; Bossa Nova; *Chega de saudade*; experiência religiosa.

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### Introduction

It was the year 1959, when Brazil and the world had access to the recording that is considered the starting point of bossa nova: the song “*Chega de saudade*” (“No more blues” is the title in English), written by the maestro Tom Jobim and

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the poet Vinicius de Moraes, and recorded by an unknown musician who went by the name of João Gilberto. Something happened around that recording. There are continued discussions about the sound and the political and cultural elements that converged. It is even customary to question whether the phenomenon represented a rupture or largely a reinterpretation of what had already existed in Brazilian Popular Music (MPB, *Música Popular Brasileira*). Was it genius or mimesis? Sixty years later, however, it is difficult to minimize the effect of the emergence of bossa nova through that song. The recording of “Chega de saudade,” therefore, became a landmark of what I consider in this text an existential turn in Brazilian song, invigorated by the bossa nova movement. “Chega de saudade” catalysed the spirit and yearnings that moved a new generation of musicians and music lovers and echoed in the hearts and minds of later generations as well.

Several testimonies from great Brazilian musicians point to this “something else” that took place around “Chega de saudade”. One of most significant involves Gilberto Gil, in a 2014 interview with Charles Gavin on Canal Brasil's “O som do vinyl” TV program. Gavin asked Gil if he remembered the first time he heard “Chega de saudade”, where he was, what he was doing. Gil replied assertively:

I was having lunch. It was at the table in the house, around 1 pm, one in the afternoon, in Salvador, my aunt, my grandmother, my sister, the people who lived in the house. It was late 1959, early 1960, so I was 16, 17 years old, and it was played. I was so impressed that 10, 15 minutes later, when I had finished my meal, I went to the store next to the house – there was no telephone in our house – and called Radio Bahia, asked for the telephone catalog, found the number and I called Radio Bahia, and asked: “I want to know about a song, Chega de saudade...”, because they said the title after the performance, “by the singer João Gilberto, I don't know who it is, I wanted to know...” And he said to me: “He is a new singer, of a just-released record that the radio started to play two or three days ago...”<sup>2</sup>

Gavin then asked, “And what touched you about this record”.

It touched everything, touched everything... [answered, Gil, smiling] It touched everything in me. Mostly the guitar, that touched me in a special way... Of course, the emission way, the soft voice, the cool emission, quiet, the smooth notes, without vibrato. But especially the guitar. I said: what is this? What instrument is being played? It's a guitar, I recognized, but I've never heard a guitar played like that. That created on me an extraordinary curiosity and immediately made me have the courage to pick up a guitar for the first time. I played accordion at the time, I already had a band, I had recorded jingles, things like that. So I decided to pick up the guitar. It was this record, this audition, this special moment of the audition of “Chega de

<sup>2</sup> All the translations were made by the author. Available in: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uprha874Ng>>. Accessed on: December 08, 2021.

saudade”, that made me, finally..., play the guitar. And with the guitar came everything, the desire to compose..., the desire to make songs, to create songs and all that.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, Brazil, in some way, owes to that song an artist as important as Gilberto Gil. Similar statements were made by Edu Lobo, Chico Buarque and Caetano Veloso, among others. The memory of hearing this song for the first time in the voice and the guitar of Caetano Veloso still beats fresh in me. Today, I characterize that hearing as an experience of the unspeakable, a sacred experience. I do not remember where or when, but looking for the version I heard, I found, if not that one, a similar one, by Caetano, with the surprise of the following line introducing a foreign audience to the song: “one song that is for me the core, the center of the whole meaning of Brazilian music’s attitude”<sup>4</sup>. Joyce Moreno, in an interview with Radio Batuta, also went in the same direction: “it is the most important event in Brazilian music of all time”.<sup>5</sup>

If we assume that music is capable of articulating deep feelings about life, that it moves people and brings out the meaning of existence, and that, in addition, it demands openness and a relationship, we will agree that the musical experience belongs to the same sphere as that of the experience of the sacred. If, on the other hand, Brazilian popular song is a way of expressing Brazil and, therefore, of dreaming about it and lamenting it, it seems that in “Chega de saudade” senses converged and horizons opened up for a revealing and profound moment in terms of cultural meaning. This is what in theology is called *kairos*, when eternity invades historical time. If we think, in the same sense, that the song is not only a way of “expressing Brazil” but also of “expressing in Brazil”, as in other places, even greater possibilities open up for interpreting and thinking about the religious meaning of art in the human adventure.

## 1. On the horizon of happiness

Approaching the subject of the existential experience of Brazilian song, in 1992, Lorenzo Mammì wrote an important article titled “João Gilberto and the utopian project of bossa nova”. Among other things, Mammì makes comparisons and lists the differences between bossa nova and jazz, stating that jazz builds its center around harmony, as a constant for melodic variation and improvisation, while in bossa nova, the central factor is the singing and the melody, but colored by infinite harmonic nuances. “That’s why jazz improvisation on bossa nova themes often produce an uncomfortable sense of uselessness,” he says. These and

<sup>3</sup> Available in: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Upgrha874Ng>>. Accessed on: December 08, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Available in: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RQxp0uJvcLs>>. Accessed on: December 08, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Available in: <<https://radiobatuta.ims.com.br/podcasts/musica-em-78-rotacoes/episodio-10-chega-de-saudade-a-gloria-final-dos-78-rpm>>. Accessed on January 14, 2021.

other differences led Mammì to state that if jazz is a “will to power”, bossa nova is a “promise of happiness” (MAMMÌ, 1992, p. 65, 70).

Mammì borrowed these ideas from Nietzsche, as José Miguel Wisnik (2004, p. 223-224) has rightly observed. It is, in fact, a quote that Nietzsche (2006, p. 73-75) makes of Stendhal and that appears in the sixth paragraph of the third dissertation of “On the Genealogy of Morality”. In this text, Nietzsche opposes Kant and his conception of beauty as that which “pleases without interest” to underline, alongside Stendhal, a conception of beauty as something that excites the will and interest as a “promise of happiness”. In other words, beauty demands relationships and involvement. There is no possibility of a disinterested attitude. Wisnik also recalls the reference to the same theme in the song “Lindeza”, by Caetano Veloso, perhaps not accidentally a bossa nova, recorded on the 1991 album *Circuladô*:

<i>Coisa linda</i>	Beautiful thing
<i>Minha humanidade cresce</i>	My humanity grows
<i>Quando o mundo te oferece</i>	When the world offers you
<i>E enfim te dá, tens lugar</i>	And finally, you give yourself, you have
<i>Promessa de felicidade</i>	place
<i>Festa da vontade</i>	Promise of happiness
<i>Nítido farol, sinal</i>	Feast of the will
<i>Novo sob o sol</i>	Clear lighthouse, sign
<i>Vida mais real</i>	New under the sun
	More real life <sup>6</sup>

The utopian project of bossa nova is like a horizon, a beacon of happiness, lightness and beauty, which takes place in a domestic intimacy and in the extended time of poetry and song. It arouses melancholy, but it also moves dreams and hope. Caetano Veloso, in an interview with *Roda Viva*, even said that it was bossa nova, and especially Vinicius de Moraes, who broke with the Brazilian tradition of songs about failed love. In addition, for him, *Chega de saudade* is the first song that promises joy and happiness, which also give origin to bossa nova. In his comments, however, Caetano curiously mentions not the lyrics but a particular musical element: the harmonic structure of the song, which, in justice to the title, starts its second part in a major key, leaving behind the minor key of the first part. It deals, of course, with the power of the meaning of sound.<sup>7</sup>

Behind this promise was the figure of a misfit and unemployed singer-guitarist who had recently been discharged from a mental facility under orders by his father; an amateur musician, in the best sense of the word, obsessed with music and precision, who reinterpreted traditions in an absolutely modern way but who was not willing to sacrifice himself on the altar of the market: João Gilberto. There was also a young conductor who, throughout that decade, had been building a

<sup>6</sup> A beautiful recent version can be had accessed in: <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j\\_huNYViyx8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_huNYViyx8)>. Accessed on: December 08, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Available in: <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=onKg\\_-7rCQ0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=onKg_-7rCQ0)>, access in December 21, 2021.

harmonic and melodic language with his own accent, writing arrangements for radio and studio orchestras, composing, and, as he used to say, “fighting with the rent”: Tom Jobim, who was responsible for creating the most emblematic melodies and harmonies of bossa nova, as well as a minimalist arranging style that perfectly matched João Gilberto's way of singing and playing. Finally, adding literary and poetic sense to what was being born, a middle-aged diplomat and recognized poet, looking for new horizons; a troubled, intense writer, a romantic, wanting to translate into popular language his experiences, that until then had been closer to the erudite world; an intellectual who definitively joined the universe of literature with Brazilian song: Vinicius de Moraes. Parodying Ricoeur, who referred to Nietzsche, Marx and Freud as “the masters of suspicion”, I venture to say that João, Tom and Vinicius are Brazil's masters of beauty. They masterfully exercised the ars of the song, and from their workshop, echoes of that primeval synthesis that brought a different way of living the song in Brazil still reach us. From then on, Brazilian popular music would have been transformed. Joyce Moreno, for example, in the aforementioned interview with Radio Batuta, shared what happened when she heard, as a child, João Gilberto singing “A felicidade”, by Tom and Vinicius, on a television program:

[...] and that had a huge impact on me, for the lyrics, the melody, the harmony, for what he was doing there. I cried, I went to my room to pray, to ask God, I wanted to learn how to do that. But it wasn't just that, I wanted to learn how to do all that. I wanted to learn to write lyrics like Vinicius, music like Tom, sing and play like João Gilberto. A rather modest life plan, as you can see...<sup>8</sup>

## 2. A movement toward emptying: its roots, its identity

Alongside Tom, Vinicius and João, there was soon a group of young musicians: some already experienced, such as Aloysio de Oliveira, Luiz Bonfá, Sérgio Ricardo, Os Cariocas, Luizinho Eça, Milton Banana and the prematurely deceased Newton Mendonça, a childhood friend of Tom. Add to these the others who risked their first songs and had fallen in love with the new musical winds that were blowing in Rio de Janeiro: Roberto Menescal, Carlos Lyra, Nara Leão, Ronaldo Bôscoli, Wanda Sá, Astrud Gilberto, Sylvia Telles, among many others. To these would join, in future partnerships, musicians as important as Edu Lobo, Baden Powell, Chico Buarque de Holanda, Marcos Valle and Dori Caymmi. There were also, it should be remembered, the predecessors of bossa nova: Dick Farney, Johnny Alf and João Donato were references for everyone. In this confluence of artists, bossa nova took shape as a movement.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Available in: <<https://radiobatuta.ims.com.br/podcasts/musica-em-78-rotacoes/episodio-10-chega-de-saudade-a-gloria-final-dos-78-rpm>>. Accessed on January 14, 2021.

<sup>9</sup> I agree with José Estevam Gava (2002, p. 40) when he identifies the first winds of what would become bossa nova in the recording of “Copacabana” (João de Barro and Alberto Ribeiro) made

The word "movement" is, moreover, pertinent to the relationship between religion and music, since it belongs to both semantic spheres. First, "movement" can mean both the act of moving and a gathering of people with common interests and goals. Both meanings of the term indicate, in a religious sense, what dynamizes life (*dunamis*, from the Greek) and what generates movement, as a vital force that underlies everything, Power. If there is an authentic movement of people together, there is a level of depth, of seriousness, of vital force. This is what Tillich called "ultimate concern", a supreme interest that moves and uninstalls. In music, in turn, the word "movement" refers both to the individual parts that compose a piece or musical work, to the tempo, the speed of the pulsations, and the rhythm. Symphonies, operas, and sonatas contain different movements that subdivide them. The song "Chega de saudade" can, for example, also be thought of as a piece in two movements, one in a minor key and the other in a major key. The movements of a piece complement each other and give dynamics to the music, depending on the different tempos that constitute them. They give energy to the music, they are a constitutive part of its vital force, of its *dunamis*.

In a text written in the heat of the moment, in 1966, "Balanço da Bossa Nova", maestro Julio Medaglia (1974) identified two types of popular music. One is the result of the telecommunications industry—artificial and amorphous, it changes its structure quickly and is linked to international monopolies. The other one, in turn:

has its roots in the proper popular imagination and is used and disseminated by the radio [...] even though it is flexible, influenced and evolves according to various circumstances, it is naturally linked to the human characteristics of the people who created it. Analyzing it, it is possible to establish a psychological portrait of these people to know their different spiritual facets, their various forms of expression, their entrails, resources and the reach of their imagination (MEDAGLIA, 1974, p. 68).

For the maestro, there was initially an anonymous activism that gave rise to bossa nova. Later, however, this was professionalized and become a quality export product. Bossa nova had brought new standards of interpretation and composition. It belonged, for Medaglia (1974, p. 70), to the second type of popular music and had a "real importance as authentic art: representative of the exact spiritual characteristics of the Brazilian people".

Medaglia (1974, p. 71) identifies, in this sense, the roots of bossa nova in samba. For him, however, if the samba is extroverted, massive, and belongs to the street, bossa nova is, in contrast, "introverted, appropriate for the privacy of small venues", as a "cameristic version" of the samba. In addition, there is a statement by Tom Jobim that interestingly corroborates this interpretation. Tom said:

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by Dick Farney, in 1946. The recording can be accessed at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IkZZL6s5b-g>>. Accessed on: January 14, 2022.

According to some people, bossa nova is a tamborim beat inside the samba school, one of the samba beats inside there, in this general polyrhythmics, in this oceanic sea that is a samba school, in which sometimes all spaces, the silences are filled with beats, with rhythm, to the point that it becomes like a sea, a storm in the sea, you know? So you don't have rhythm anymore, you have an oooooowwwwaaahhhh..., a continuous noise, understand? And João Gilberto knew so well how to empty all that.<sup>10</sup>

Even if one can object that no culture is pure, what obviously applies to a multifaceted and bordering phenomenon like bossa nova is this element of local rooting in samba, yet is important to underline its identity and authenticity, its vital force, as I said above. The existential level of the musical experience, in fact, implies a process of self-rootedness. This, further, is either authentic, or has no meaning. The emptying rootedness in samba, which Jobim and Medaglia identify and which manifests itself in different ways in bossa nova, becomes, after all, one of the indices that allow us to speak of an existential turn in the movement. The spiritual depth of its roots reveals the entrails of a people's imagination, as Medaglia said. To the indigenous roots of samba, however, also converged exogenous currents from Europe and the US through the influx of jazz, classical music, poetry and literature.

It however is important, even so, to underline not only the cultural rupture of bossa nova but also its continuity with what was done in Brazilian music before it. João Gilberto is perhaps the greatest example of this. His albums are full of reinterpretations of songs from before bossa nova, such as, for example, “Rosa Morena” (by Dorival Caymmi), “É luxo só” (by Ary Barroso and Luis Peixoto) and “Morena da boca de ouro” (also by Ary Barroso). The rerecording of “Aos pés da Santa Cruz”, composed by Marino Pinto and Zé da Zilda, originally released in 1942 by Orlando Silva, is also iconic in this sense. It also in addition should be noted that these four songs already appear on the LP “Chega de saudade”, the initial landmark of the movement, which we will discuss below.<sup>11</sup>

Among the nuances of emptying in bossa nova, there is an aesthetics of minimum, identified by Naves and Britto (2017, p. 38), in the work of Tom Jobim. Bossa nova is, after all, a subtle and elaborated musical expression, and as Medaglia said (1974, p. 72), “suggested for the intimacy of small environments”. A music focused on detail, based on voice and guitar, at most small ensembles. Bossa nova gradually distanced itself from the boisterous voices, vibratos, large orchestras, the intense atmosphere, the painful emotions of boleros, so characteristic of an aesthetic of excess. There is a process of subjectivation, of

<sup>10</sup> The testimony appears in the documentary “Tom e a bossa”, by Waltes Salles, recorded in 1993. First part available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=np1JUswLLuU>>; second part available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ecElk6HVp9s>>; access at: December 20, 2021.

<sup>11</sup> In the voice of Orlando Silva, available at: <<https://immub.org/album/78-rpm-67061>>; accessed on December 20, 2021; In the voice of João Gilberto, in: <<https://immub.org/album/chega-de-saudade>>; accessed on December 20, 2021.

interiorization, common to everything that is existentially significant, in the voice and guitar of bossa nova. There is, actually, a great silence around it.

However, it is necessary to emphasize that the experience of meaning in art is something that implies a relationship, and therefore it does not belong, in any way, to the individual psyche alone. Paul Tillich (1967, p. 392) talks about this issue in dealing with the notion of feeling in Schleiermacher's understanding of religion, which, according to him, should not be understood as subjective emotion. For Tillich:

Rather, it is the impact of the universe upon us in the depths of our being which transcends subject and object. It is obvious that he means it in this sense. Therefore, instead of speaking of feeling, he could also speak of intuition of the universe, and this intuition he could describe as divination. This term is derived, of course, from "divine" and means awareness of the divine immediately. It means that there is an immediate perception of what transcends the subject and the object, which is the foundation of everything that exists, within us. (TILLICH, 1967, p. 392).

This intuition of the universe is, in turn, culturally mediated also by music. Music is divination, in those terms. This is an excellent key to thinking about the question of existential depth in the aesthetic-musical experience and its religious meaning. For Schleiermacher, faith would be a "feeling of unconditional dependence", which naturally transcends the merely psychological sphere (TILLICH, 1967, p. 393). This is what we mean by saying that the musical experience demands involvement and relationship. After all, it does not happen without an attitude of interested listening, of openness to an otherness. Listening is always listening *to* some sound, and feeling is always feeling *for* someone or something. It is promise *of* happiness. A presence *of* absence, says Rubem Alves (1981, p. 14ss).

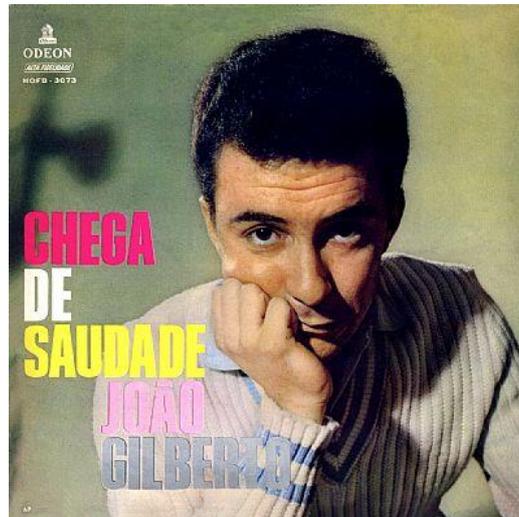
One of the consequences of this understanding is also to perceive the intersubjective dimension, the movement that crosses this experience, as well as its social and cultural implications. It is, after all, a relation with music but also between people. In his text on bossa nova, Medaglia (1974, p. 72) indicates that it was a music style that had identification with the upper classes due to the access to information that this part of the population had, which enabled them to absorb more sophisticated musical content, such as bossa nova. If this is true, then the aesthetic experience, as well as religious experience, cannot be reduced to class stratification. It is precisely the power to transcend local histories and social conditions that allows certain songs, or any manifestation of beauty, to become universal. Music allows the transcendence of historical conditions and can generate other forms of intersubjective identification.

Regardless, the success of bossa nova happened, and the bossa nova movement had national and international repercussions. To that repercussion converged elements of artistic creation, reception and the sharing of meanings but

also of political context, market and recording technology. The more direct musical elements will be discussed later. They come to life, initially, on the inaugural bossa nova recording—the LP *Chega de saudade*.

### 3. The album, the albums and the making of a language

The song “Chega de saudade” also provides the title to João Gilberto's album released by Odeon in March 1959. Tom Jobim was the musical director, wrote the arrangements and played the pianos, which was also the case for João's two subsequent albums (*O amor, o sorriso e a flor* [Brazil's Brilliant João Gilberto, Capitol], from 1960; and “João Gilberto”, from 1961).<sup>12</sup>



(In: <<https://immub.org/album/cheга-de-saudade>>)

The album has 12 tracks: two by Tom and Vinicius (*Chega de saudade* and *Brigas nunca mais*), two by João himself (*Hô-bá-lá-lá* and *Bim bom*), one by Tom and Newton Mendonça (*Desafinado*), two by Carlos Lyra and Ronaldo Bôscoli (*Lobo bobo e Saudade fez um samba*) and another by Carlos Lyra (*Maria ninguém*), in addition to the already mentioned songs by Dorival Caymmi (*Rosa Morena*), Ary Barroso (*Morena da boca de ouro*), Ary Barroso and Luis Peixoto (*É luxo só*), and by the partners Marino Pinto and Zé da Zilda (*Aos pés da Santa Cruz*). It is a collection of classics, coming from the hands of composers who passed to the “MPB hall of fame”.

A single was released in August 1958, containing “Chega de saudade” and “Bim bom”. Even before that, however, singer Elizete Cardoso had released an LP titled “*Canção do amor demais*”, only with songs by Tom and Vinicius.<sup>13</sup> Tom, who also arranged, conducted and played the pianos on the album, invited João

<sup>12</sup> Available in: <<https://immub.org/album/cheга-de-saudade>>. Accessed on: December 22, 2021.

<sup>13</sup> Available in: <<https://immub.org/album/cancao-do-amor-demais>>. Accessed on: December 22, 2021.

Gilberto to play his bossa nova beat on the guitar in “Chega de saudade”, “Outra vez” and three more songs. According to Ruy Castro (2016, p. 171-172), however, Elizete's album, released by a small label called Festa, did not have much of an impact. Perhaps, to depend only on that recording, the guitar of João had been buried for history. Furthermore, Tom's arrangements did not yet contain the element of emptying that would develop along with João's voice and guitar. Additionally, the interpretation of Elizete could not be considered as belonging to the genre of bossa nova. In short, everything was too much in “Canção do amor demais” (Too much love song, translating). That aesthetic of excess imposed itself. It was not yet, in fact, a bossa nova album. That same year, The Cariocas had also recorded the song “Chega de saudade”, also with João on guitar, in a recording exiled from the countless samba songs of the time, despite the virtuosity of the group's traditional vocal interventions.<sup>14</sup>

It would take a few more months of gestation for bossa nova to be born. A nuance of the intentions and expectations surrounding the album “Chega de saudade” can be seen from the presentation that Jobim wrote on the back cover of the album:

João Gilberto is a 26-year-old “bossa nova” guy from Bahia. In a very short time, he has influenced a whole generation of arrangers, guitarists, musicians and singers. Our main concern in this long-playing was that João would not be jumbled by arrangements that took away his freedom, his natural agility, his personal and non-transferable way of being, in short, his spontaneity. In the arrangements contained in this long-playing, João actively participated; his hints, his ideas, they're all there. When João Gilberto accompanies himself, the guitar is him. When the orchestra accompanies him, the orchestra is also him. João Gilberto does not underestimate the sensitivity of the people. He believes that there is always room for something new, different and pure that – although at first glance it doesn't appear so – can become, as they say in specialized language: highly commercial. Because the people understand the love, the notes, the simplicity and sincerity. I believe in João Gilberto, because he is simple, sincere and extraordinarily musical.  
P.S.: Caymmi thinks so too (apud MACHADO, 2008, p. 28).

Shortly after the release of the LP “Chega de saudade”, João Gilberto no longer needed any sponsorship, not even from Dorival Caymmi, who exercised a type of ancestry over the younger generations. In 1962, João Gilberto already had a career with international impact. Bossa nova had “made America”, as Brazilian musicians used to say. Together, Gilberto and Jobim created a new musical language that was conquering the world. They had not created it out of nothing, obviously. This is never possible in cultural terms. There are clear elements and phenomena that preceded bossa nova and influenced it. However, as I said at the

<sup>14</sup> Available in: <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_C65pK3tTVg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_C65pK3tTVg)>, access on: December, 21, 2021.

beginning of this text, something special happened in the Jobim-Gilberto-Moraes convergence (GAVA, 2002, p. 40ss)

Jobim's work prior to bossa nova is well known today: the Rio de Janeiro Symphony, with Billy Blanco, Black Orpheus, with Vinicius, in addition to other songs of his own authorship or in partnership with Mário Pinto or Dolores Duran, for example. João Gilberto's journey to pursue this language has also been studied. In his book, Ruy Castro (2016, p. 137ss) narrates the pilgrimage of João from Juazeiro to ostracism in Rio de Janeiro, then passing through Porto Alegre, helped by Luiz Telles, and through Diamantina, welcomed by his sister, Dadainha, and then returning in 1956 to the care of the family at his parents' house, when the psychiatric treatment mentioned above took place. When João returned to Rio, in 1957, bossa nova was being born in his voice and his guitar, and he began to show what he had created. It is known that, at a certain point, homemade recordings of João began to circulate in the southern districts of Rio de Janeiro. No one knew for sure who was playing and singing, but it found its way especially among young people. Today, access to those recordings is partially available. Some of them are on the album "João Gilberto records at the house of Chico Pereira in 1958".<sup>15</sup> It surprises hearing the naturalness of João playing and singing informally in the house of friends, wandering through the repertoire that would constitute bossa nova a short time later. It surprises, mainly, how everything was already resolved and ready in his voice and his guitar. Bossa nova was coming into existence in that intimacy, in that detachment. It remained for the world to discover it. That year, when João knocked on Tom's house and showed him some songs, the necessary confluences for this took place.

For Julio Medaglia (1974, p. 73-74), the album *Chega de saudade* is a watershed. It featured "a strange singer who sang softly, discreetly and almost inexpressively, interpreted melodies difficult to be sung, saying "é só isso o meu baião e não tem mais nada não" ['bim bom bim bom, that's all my baião and there's nothing else']. In addition, "the orchestra played one or another phrase and silenced, the guitar accompaniment had a 'beat' and a harmony completely different from what we were used to hear". Even so, argues the maestro, "Brazilian popular music sensibility" proved, once again, its perspicacity, welcoming that strange interpreter and consuming the LP on a large scale.

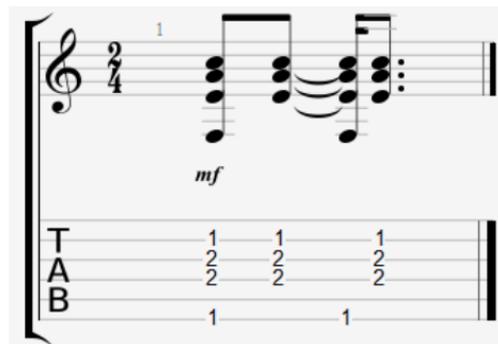
Medaglia (1974, p. 74) highlights the record for its uniqueness. It was new, unusual, and spoke to the hearts of many Brazilians. On the record, João Gilberto, Tom Jobim and the other composers catalyzed aspirations, affections, anxieties, and the dreams of their time and gave these feelings an aesthetic-musical expression that bolstered and fulfilled them, affecting them. Affection in effect. Effect in affection. This factor of rupture, of turning point, carries the dynamics of what, in religious language, is called conversion. The receptivity the record had serves, in turn, as an index of the potential expressiveness that bossa nova carried among its contemporaries. The new style caused controversies; it was truth, but its

<sup>15</sup> Available in: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PuBqEdb464g>>. Accessed on: December 23, 2021.

musical message quickly was absorbed, especially by the youth. For them, guitar became the preferred instrument.

#### 4. Sound horizons of the bossanovist song

The most original element, in the sense of *genos* (in Greek), of bossa nova is rhythmic: the famous guitar beat. It is what remains at the end of the process of emptying the samba school's drum session beat, as Jobim said. The bossa nova beat, in its simplest form, can thus be represented as follows in an F7M chord:



It is interesting, in this sense, to think about the existential level of musical experience to observe what Wisnik (2017, p. 21) called “correspondence between the sound scales and the body scales with which we measure time”. Even in its representation, the sound wave obeys a pulse, and there is a principle of pulsation. Since the body-mind is a “frequential meter of frequencies”, argues Wisnik, “our entire relationship with the sonic universes and music passes through certain somatic and psychic pulsation patterns, which we play with when reading time and sound”. The first perceptible manifestation of human life, after all, is rhythm, the beating of the heart. There is nothing more existential than that; hence, the centrality of the bossa nova guitar beat.

The calmness that beat represents, its pulse, its *dunamis*, in the face of the oceanic rhythmic storm of a samba school, imprints in the body a process of enlevation, of enchantment. Harmony, melody, arrangement, and instrumentation are, of course, fundamental, as are the lyrics, but at the base of it all there is a beat, a tempo, a pulse. In addition, as the rock band Os Titãs says, despite everything, “o pulso ainda pulsa e o corpo ainda é pouco” (the pulse still beats, and the body is still not enough).<sup>16</sup> We want more and better. We want the horizon. What it should be, it still is not, in the words of Rubem Alves. Bossa nova seems to be, in fact, a promise of happiness.

In his classic text on the sacred in art, Gerardus van der Leeuw (1963) dedicates the first chapter to dance, the most corporeal of the arts. He argues that

<sup>16</sup> Available in: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N2US94b-6z8>>. Accessed on January 10, 2021.

there was a time when art and religion were indistinguishable, the time of “primitive peoples”, as they said then: “Song was prayer; drama was divine performance; dance was cult” (LEEuw, 1963, p. 11). The point is that the distinction between profane and sacred art, which we made today, was then unknown. Every art form had a sacred basis. It is not difficult to agree with van der Leeuw.

Later in his book, in a chapter devoted to the literature and poetry, following a similar argument, van der Leeuw (1963, p. 115) focuses specifically on the issue of rhythm. Dealing with work songs, the music that is sung while working, he initially emphasizes that it is not about the power of the content of words, since “at the magical, primitive stage, the beauty of words does not reside in their meaning, but in their rhythm, in their meter”. The power of the words is concentrated and controlled by rhythm. This is, for van der Leeuw, the religious meaning of the work song. What is sung is not as important as the power emanating from the energy and rhythm of the work song. At that primitive stage, van der Leeuw says, one cannot yet speak of a “verbal art”. What did exist was only a “rhythmic art”, whose boundaries between music, dance and word could hardly be established. It can be imagined that some of that importance of rhythm still remains as a residue in modern societies. The huge interest in large pop music shows indicates that. Also the percussion group classes in Brazilian urban centers focused on regional beats, that do not cease to appear and allow, through rhythm, through pulsation, people to gather around that existential experience of art.

A parallel can be found between van der Leeuw's phenomenological perspective and the power of the bossa nova beat. However, instead of condensing energy as in the “work songs”, bossa nova dissipates energy, it disappears into the sea, it goes with the wind, emptying itself. The rhythm is slow, the meter is broken, and the beat is syncopated. Everything contributes to an internalization process in a dialectic of tension and distension.

But it is not just about the guitar. The unity between voice and guitar is fundamental in bossa nova. The voice, however, has a free tempo division, considering the guitar beat and its proper rhythmic complexity. Even so, starting with João Gilberto, the musician who sings and plays the guitar is actually doing only one thing, and this one thing only takes care of the whole body, the whole person. Wanda Sá (2006, p. 32) still talks about the emergence of a third instrument that results from the union of the voice and the guitar. It is not a regular popular chant, where the singer “only” sings and the rest is up to the “musicians”. With the voice and the guitar of bossa nova, the DNA of Brazilian popular music was altered. The guitar is, after all, an instrument that is embraced; it is intimate and cozy and facilitates singing. The first moment of this relation consists, therefore, of a process of individuation and deepening for those who are singing and playing the guitar. The involvement with rhythm and harmony, with the sounds and their senses in the guitar and the voice produces a symbiosis between chant and instrument, lyrics and music, and voice and guitar—the third instrument is inseparable. “I sing playing, I don't know how to do it differently. I need to

know what the harmony is so I can sing. I need to know what chord is that. [...] I am a singer-musician”, says Wanda Sá (2006, p. 32). This symbiotic intimacy of the voice and the guitar somehow extends itself beyond the artist's universe and gains, as a sound proclamation, as a promise, the horizon of other universes.

João Gilberto and Tom Jobim understood the importance of securing a place for the third instrument in the production of the album "Chega de saudade". This is what Gilberto Gil's testimony indicates: what touched him the most was the guitar beat. Had the guitar been hidden in the background, submerged in the orchestra, it would not be heard or noticed. By demanding, in the studio, a microphone for the guitar, Gilberto created the technical conditions for the third instrument to appear aesthetically. Its recording and the possibility of reproduction made it possible for the experience to multiply infinitely, reaching the era of "streaming".

The sensibility with which Tom Jobim, in turn, understood and welcomed that new bossa is surprising. Tom translated into the arrangements João's style in guitar and voice. In fact, the aesthetics of Tom's arrangements would be imprinted into the style of bossa nova from its birth. The arrangements were also emptied. There is, on the one hand, a percussive rhythmic base that dialogues seamlessly with the guitar and, on the other hand, ultraeconomic incursions of harmonic and/or melodic instruments in a conversation with the third instrument. On the percussive base are the drums, a bongo, maracas, a tambourine and sometimes a triangle. The rhythm section is consistent, precise and discreet and engages masterfully with the syncopated, broken beat of the guitar. The name behind this percussive foundation is the drummer Milton Banana, who is barely remembered but was one of the important architects of bossa nova. The precision and elegance with which he conducted the rhythm section is a very important element in the language of bossa nova. It is that type of performance that, being so well placed, is almost unnoticed. For the rest, there is Tom's piano in quick and punctual interventions, in the style of a woodwind or a strings section, like an orchestral instrument, leaving the harmonic base to João's guitar. Here and there, the backing track of strings and a flute or a trombone are added to the piano, bringing different colors to the conversation. That is it.

Another key element of bossa nova's physiognomy is the chant. It is an untuned way of singing, with a smooth vocal emission, without vibrato, without raptures, and without drama. Julio Medaglia (1974, p. 76) described João Gilberto's way of singing as an interpretation without personal demagogy and virtuosity. Discretion, subtlety and rigor overlapped. The singing contained a call to internalization, and the musical narrative had a colloquial character. Everything, in fact, denied the centrality of the “singer”, the “soloist”, the “star”. That represented a great rupture with the previous hegemonic way of singing. This is, for example, one of the issues that separates the aforementioned album by Elizete Cardoso, conceived in the context of an aesthetic of excess, from later bossa nova albums, despite being an album with songs by Tom and Vinicius. From João Gilberto's point of view, untuning the voice also means assuming the voice of your

own; it implies authenticity. The singing voice is the sound that comes from the chest, comes from within, what is perhaps the most intensely human thing in the field of musical sounds. Playing the guitar and singing, in this way, is the center of the existential deepening of bossa nova.

There is also, of course, the harmonic and melodic dimension. The development of the guitar language and the arrangements of bossa nova included inverted chords and so-called dissonances as influences coming from jazz and classical music. The harmonies were sophisticated and sometimes contained series of tonal modulations permeating imaginative melodies (MEDAGLIA, 1974, p. 76). The term dissonance indicates that the superstructure of the chords has an extended space, with the insertion of notes that increases the dynamics between tension and distention: ninths, diminished fifths, augmented elevenths, thirteenth, etc. According to José Estevam Gava (2002, p. 42), the compact chords used percussively by João Gilberto could even give the idea of tonal ambiguity. In any case, Brazilian traditional harmony found its transcendence there toward a new sound universe.

The song *Chega de saudade* is a good example of how harmonic language adds meaning to music, in this case, -even before the lyrics. The first part of the song is constructed around the tonal center of Dm. After the introduction, whose melody played by the flute begins in a dissonant context, stressing the ninth and fourth degrees and ends in a preparation with a subV7 chord (Eb7, substitute for the dominant), the harmony then starts to dialogue with melody through something that would become a hallmark of Tom: a descending chromatic bass line sequence of chords — Dm, Dm/C, E7/B, Bbm6, A7, and then back to Dm. The harmony continues without major mishaps, and after a brief variation around the subdominant (Gm), everything is again resolved around the tonal center. The context is melancholic and nocturnal. At the end of the first part, however, the harmony is modulated to D, and the melody starts to obey a major scale. I will not make a complete harmonic analysis here, but it is enough to say that intelligent, unusual sequences, based on several dissonant and inverted chords, lead the harmony until the end of the song, around the tonal center of D major. As often happens, the atmosphere becomes sunny, light and luminous in the change from the first to the second part.

There is, in bossa nova, and especially in Jobim and Gilberto, something that Gava (2002, p. 36) and Costa e Silva (2010) considered a sort of harmonic impressionism, full of tension with different lights and colours. Such a feature comes into that environment through the hand of Tom, who deeply studied French impressionist composers such as Debussy and Ravel. Regarding the world of painting, Paul Tillich (cf. Maraschin, 2003, p. 198-199) once declared that French impressionism carried less existential depth than German expressionism, but he still liked Cézanne, who is today considered a postimpressionist. For Tillich, impressionism was too superficial.<sup>17</sup> The fact is that impressionism and

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Paul Tillich: “One can see, in fact, in Cezane's still lifes, in Marc's animal figures, in Schmidt-Rottluff's landscapes, or in Nolde's erotic pictures, the immediate revelation of absolute reality in

expressionism marked, between the 19th and 20th centuries, a transition point. Despite the contrasts between the movements, there are also many points of contact: outdoor painting, everyday themes, the direct experience of color and light, the appreciation of subjectivity and individuality, among others.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps bossa nova, in the mid-twentieth century, represents a Brazilian expression close to those European artistic movements.

Vinicius de Moraes, of course, soon understood the meanings of the harmony and the melody of “Chega de saudade” and thought up a lyric that perfectly matched the sound colors of the two-part song. The report by Vinicius to the newspaper “Última hora” (*Last hour*), at the end of the 1960s, reveals the following:

Tom repeated it ten times. It was a total favour, with a melancholic and plangent texture, and really "slow chorinho" in its spirit. I kept the melody in my ear and I was always humming it at home, waiting for a cue of poetry. That was something really new, original, entirely different from anything that had come before, but as Brazilian as any choro by Pixinguinha or any samba by Cartola. A circular samba, where each measure was a complaint of pain, each note a longing for someone far away. But the lyrics did not come. [...] I think that in all my life as a lyricist I have never been beaten like this. I made 10, 20 attempts. [...] I was already getting furious. [...]

One morning, after the beach, suddenly the resolution arrived. I was so happy that I gave a shout of joy, to the shock of my two little girls. I sang and sang again the samba giving attention to each detail, the color of the words in correspondence to music, the accentuation of the tonic, the problems of breath inside of verses, to everything. After the Black Orpheus sambas, I wanted to present my partner with lyrics worthy of his new music, because I felt it was new, moving in a direction that I could not name, but whose name was implicit in the creation. It really was bossa nova being born, just asking, in terms of interpretation, for the division that João Gilberto would discover soon after.

I gave the title “Chega de saudade” using one of the verses. I called Tom and dropped by his apartment. The maestro sat down at the piano and I sang the samba to him two or three times without him saying anything. Then I saw him taking the paper, putting it on the piano stand and singing it himself. And, soon calling his wife in a vibrant tone: - "Thereza!" (apud *HOMEM & OLIVEIRA*, 2012, p. 61-62).

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relative things, the profound content of the world, experienced in the artist's religious ecstasy, shining through things. These things become sacred objects” (apud *MARASCHIN*, 2003, p. 198).

<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., the exposition organized at the National Gallery of Berlin in 2015: “Impressionismus - Expressionismus. Kunstwende” [Impressionism - Expressionism. Art at a Turning Point“]. Available in: <<https://www.smb.museum/ausstellungen/detail/impressionismus-expressionismus-kunstwende/>>. Accessed on: 19/01/2022.

With Vinicius' lyrics, "Chega de saudade" brought to the sphere of the word the transition from a lament to a celebration.

<i>Vai minha tristeza</i>	Go my sadness
<i>E diz a ela que sem ela não pode ser</i>	And tell her that without her it can't be
<i>Diz-lhe numa prece</i>	Tell her in a prayer
<i>Que ela regresse</i>	That she must come back
<i>Porque eu não posso mais sofrer</i>	Because I can't suffer anymore
<i>Chega de saudade,</i>	Enough of longing,
<i>A realidade é que sem ela</i>	The reality is that without her
<i>Não há paz, não há beleza</i>	There is no peace, there is no beauty
<i>É só tristeza e a melancolia</i>	It's just sadness and melancholy
<i>Que não sai de mim,</i>	That won't leave me,
<i>Não sai de mim, não sai</i>	Won't leave me, won't leave
<i>Mas se ela voltar,</i>	But if she comes back,
<i>Se ela voltar</i>	If she comes back
<i>Que coisa linda,</i>	What a beautiful thing,
<i>Que coisa louca</i>	What a crazy thing
<i>Pois há menos peixinhos a nadar no mar</i>	Because there are fewer little fishes swimming in the sea
<i>Do que os beijinhos que darei na sua boca</i>	Than the kisses I'll give your mouth
<i>Dentro dos meus braços, os abraços</i>	Inside my arms, hugs
<i>Hão de ser milhões de abraços</i>	Will be millions of hugs,
<i>Apertado assim, colado assim, calado</i>	Tight like this, glued like this, silent like this
<i>assim</i>	Hugs and kisses and affections without an end
<i>Abraços e beijinhos e carinhos sem ter fim</i>	That is to stop this thing
<i>Que é pra acabar com esse negócio</i>	Of you living without me
<i>De você viver sem mim</i>	

Thus, the renowned, erudite poet, in "Chega da saudade", approached colloquial speech, rhyming in Portuguese *beijinhos* (little kisses) and *peixinhos* (little fishes). In reference to the poetics of bossa nova, Medaglia (1974, p. 87) identified that the texts:

illustrate the affective and human aspirations of this people. As if trying to react in order not to succumb to the determinism of technique, to the dryness of the asphalt, to the distressing struggle for material survival, [...] the poetic imagination of bossa nova found in the symbolism of "love, the smile and the flower" its source of inspiration and spiritual energy.

It was 1958, shortly after the song was composed, when the talents of João, Tom and Vinicius converged in the emergence of bossa nova. Tom provided the harmonic and melodic material; Vinicius, the lyrical substance; and João, the form, a new way of playing and singing.

## 5. The impact

It was argued that the bossa nova movement, properly speaking, only existed between 1958 and 1962-1963 (GAVA, 2002, p. 36; TATIT, 2004, p. 179). Speaking of the influence of that movement means, however, to put in perspective practically all MPB from 1959 onward, starting with giants such as Gilberto Gil, resuming his account presented at the beginning of this text; Chico Buarque de Holanda (2006), who claims to have become a composer, initially trying to imitate bossa nova and then creating his own language; Caetano Veloso, who continued to compose songs with bossa-nova inspiration throughout his career; and Edu Lobo, Djavan, Ivan Lins, Dori Caymmi, Danilo Caymmi, and Joyce, among others. Not to mention early bossanovists such as Roberto Menescal, Carlos Lyra and Wanda Sá. The list goes on and on. I think that one way to gauge the authenticity and spiritual depth of a cultural movement is by observing its impact and developments. That is, the meanings that are perpetuated and transformed.

Luiz Tatit (2004, p. 179) refers to those first five years of bossa nova as an “intense” intervention, which “created a style of song, a style of artist and even a way of being that became a national mark of civility, ideological advancement and originality”. There is also, however, in Tatit's perception, an “extensive” dimension of bossa nova, “which spread over the following decades, crossed the millennium, and whose objective is nothing less than the construction of the 'absolute song', the one that brings within itself a portion of all other songs composed in Brazil”. In addition to Tom, João and Vinicius, Menescal, Carlinhos Lyra, Nara Leão, Bôscoli, and the other already mentioned young musicians from Rio belong to the first genre, as do the aforementioned bossa nova precursors, such as Farney, Alf and Os cariocas. For the second genre, only Tom Jobim and João Gilberto belong.

“Extensive”, in this in case, does not refer to the longevity of the songs produced in the period. Vinicius de Moraes, Carlos Lyra, Roberto Menescal and others are authors of definitive songs in the Brazilian repertoire. We are referring to the project of purification of our music, of aesthetic screening, which became a model of conciseness, elimination of excesses, economy of resources and artistic performance. More precisely, it is about an attitude of revelation of essential points that are being established – but at the same time hidden – within an immense musical repertoire that tends to crush its main confection matrices. [...] what remained as a basic characteristic of their artistic performance [of Jobim and Gilberto], as a form of conduct that came to inspire their successors, was precisely this last aspect that comprises a deep look into the bowels of our musical body. There are moments in the history of the song, in the career of an artist or even in the history of a single composition in which the debugger treatment of bossa nova is necessary. In this sense, the bossa nova gesture is extensive. Both Jobim and João Gilberto never abdicated this gesture. (TATIT, 2004, p. 179-180).

The analysis is accurate. Bossa nova has a cultural significance that expands beyond its own historical accomplishment. The immersion in the deep musical tradition of Brazil carried out by Jobim and Gilberto and the consequent purification that resulted from it allowed the novelty of their language. This immersion includes, of course, samba but also transcends it toward the cultures of Brazilian backlands. The work of Jobim and Gilberto carries, in this sense, the same interest, the same strength and the same grandeur as the works of Villa-Lobos and Guimarães Rosa. Even in dialogue with exogenous musical languages, such as cool jazz and classical music, the extended meaning of bossa nova is to delve into tradition and reinvent it. This is, according to Tatit, the extensive gesture that remains a legacy for Brazilian Popular Music as a whole.

However, there is also the bossa-nova way of singing, playing the guitar, writing lyrics, composing songs, as well as harmonizing and arranging them—which is easy to perceive. As Tatit noted, this is so ingrained in Brazilian Popular Music culture that it can sometimes be hidden. For someone not to understand the greatness and importance of Jobim and Gilberto can happen for the simple fact that the language they created is so naturally embedded in the culture that it crosses, without one realizing it, the ways of playing, singing and thinking about music and Brazil. The beat of the guitar is the greatest example of this. However, the accent of the harmonies of Jobim and Gilberto can also be unmistakably perceived throughout the entire history of MPB after them, including in styles distant from bossa nova, such as rock, for example; think of the band “Los Hermanos”.

Regarding the international effects of bossa nova, there is an interesting perspective in the 2012 film “The Music According to Antonio Carlos Jobim”, directed by Nelson Pereira dos Santos and Dora Jobim, with screenplay by Miúcha and Nelson Pereira dos Santos. The film was produced entirely with music, with no use of the spoken word. It is a great tour through the soundscape of bossa nova and the work of Jobim. It also brings, however, numerous images that attest to the repercussion of bossa nova around the world, not only in the US jazz environment. Even so, to cite just a few of the greats of American music who dialogued with bossa nova, we should remember Miles Davies, Stan Getz, Gerry Mulligan, Charlie Bird, Tony Bennett, Dizzy Gillespie, Herbie Mann, Ella Fitzgerald, Herbie Hancock, Sarah Vaughan, Judy Garland, and Frank Sinatra, among others. There are also, in the so-called “real books”—published scores and harmonies of jazz standards, with wide international circulation among musicians—several of the bossa nova classics. Indeed, even today, any self-respecting jazz musician should have songs such as “One note samba” or “Desafinado” at their fingertips. The movie “Tom and the Bossa”, by Walter Salles (1993), also brings reports in this sense, with significant lines by Gerry Mulligan, Bernard Birnbaum (TV director at CBS who directed the filming of the famous show at Carnegie Hall, in 1962) and Henry Mancini. The common point is that

they all talk of how the music of Jobim and Gilberto impacted the American musical environment, especially jazz.

...

Finally, I would like to end with an idea from poet Michael Longley, who underscores the existential dimension of art, which has brought us here:

I like the Aristotelian notion of catharsis. And I think what art can do is to tune you up. I mean, if you think of an out-of-tune violin, and tuning it up so that it's in tune, I think that's what art is, and that's what art does. And good art, good poems, is making people more human, making them more intelligent, making them more sensitive and emotionally pure than they might otherwise be.<sup>19</sup>

In tune or out of tune (*Desafinado*), the promise, at last, never ends. Bossa nova remains a utopia and an invitation to surrender and emptying. *Chega de saudade*, No more blues!

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<sup>19</sup>Available at: <<https://onbeing.org/programs/the-vitality-of-ordinary-things/#transcript>>. Accessed on 01/14/2021.

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