

# The Brazilian Music Book

Brazil's Singers, Songwriters and Musicians Tell The  
Story of Bossa Nova, MPB, and Brazilian Jazz and Pop

by Chris McGowan

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For Monica, Christopher and Juliana

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## Preface

I first wrote about Brazilian music in 1980, when I published a review in *Billboard* magazine of a concert by Flora Purim and Aírto Moreira at the Queen Mary Jazz Festival in Long Beach, California. At the time, I was already familiar with several artists from Brazil, and I was especially intrigued by the fresh, powerful music of the singer-songwriters Milton Nascimento and Gilberto Gil, which had harmonies, emotions and textures I'd never heard in North American music. I was also a fan of Aírto and Flora. He was a charismatic, virtuoso percussionist, while Flora had been the most original, and popular, vocalist in jazz of the '70s. Interestingly, Dave Dexter, Jr., who had assigned me the review, had worked years earlier for Capitol Records and been in charge of releasing the first bossa nova record in the United States (*Brazil's Brilliant João Gilberto*, in 1961).

I became even more enamored of Brazilian music in 1982, when I spent six months in Fortaleza, the capital of the northeastern state of Ceará. Located near the Equator, Fortaleza was a city that was geographically and culturally far removed from cosmopolitan Rio de Janeiro in the South. My friends there introduced me to the work of many notable Brazilian artists in a wide variety of genres. The more I heard, the more I was intrigued. There were so many rich Brazilian idioms, so many remarkable musicians, and so much cultural history.

Over the next few years, I had the opportunity to return several times to Brazil. I was a contributing writer for *Billboard* special issues and my editor there, Ed Ochs, offered me the chance to write some feature articles about the Brazilian music business. I used that as an excuse for two lengthy stays in Rio de Janeiro, and became *Billboard's* first correspondent in Brazil (as a freelance journalist). In 1987, I edited and wrote all but one of the articles for a 32-page *Billboard* supplement called "Viva Brazil." It was the largest coverage of Brazilian music ever published in a magazine or newspaper in the U.S.

Until the early '90s, I was *Billboard's de facto* specialist in Brazilian music and also contributed articles and reviews about it to *Musician*, *the Beat* and *Pulse!* My friend Ricardo Pessanha in Rio had been a musical consultant for my various projects and in 1989 we decided that the United States needed a book on Brazilian music that would serve as an introduction for novices and a reliable reference source for the already initiated. *Billboard Books* agreed to publish our project and *The Brazilian Sound: Samba, Bossa Nova and the Popular Music of Brazil* appeared in 1991. For the second edition, we switched to Temple University Press, which published revised versions of the book in 1998 and 2009. It was also translated into Japanese, French and German (Guinness Books published a U.K. edition called *The Billboard Book of Brazilian Music*).

Along the way, I conducted many interviews with Brazilian musicians while writing for *Billboard* or working on *The Brazilian Sound*. In either case, there was never the space to use more than a small portion of the interviews that I conducted.

Sometimes, they served only as background material. I always felt that there were interesting stories and details in the complete interviews, especially the longer conversations with Brazilian legends like Milton Nascimento, Gilberto Gil, Aírto Moreira, and the late Antonio Carlos Jobim.

This collection focuses primarily on artists who established their careers from the 1960s through the '80s—the great era of bossa, MPB and Brazilian jazz—and also looks at some contemporary Brazilian music. I have added profiles and discographies to each interview, in part to bring things up to date, and fitted the shortest conversations into the profiles themselves. I have included a few new talks to round out the selections. There are various glaring omissions of course, as Brazil has so many great talents, but the individuals interviewed here are a notable group of artists and several of them are among the most important popular musicians of the late twentieth century in both Brazil and the world. I hope this book will help readers further appreciate the diverse creative currents in a remarkably musical country.

*Chris McGowan*  
January 2012



## Introduction

In the late twentieth century, Brazilian music experienced a creative explosion that resulted in the formation of vibrant new styles and some of the most original and artistically rich popular music the world has heard to date. It was the time of bossa nova, which emerged at the end of the 1950s and is arguably still the world's most sublime and sophisticated pop music style. Bossa was followed in the late '60s and '70s by the rise of wonderfully eclectic *MPB* (short for "*música popular brasileira*"), which offered an unprecedented mixture of compelling melodies, rich harmonies, varied rhythms, and poetic lyrics. MPB was "world music" before the label was invented. During this same time, Brazilian music—largely because of bossa and MPB musicians—had a profound interplay with jazz in North America through its songs, rhythms, and percussion.

Beginning in the late '70s, the rise of *pagode samba* was another important musical occurrence in Brazil. A constellation of gifted musicians gathered for weekly parties with samba (*pagodes*) in Ramos on the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro, and revitalized the venerable idiom of samba, one of the planet's great musical genres. While samba has been officially recorded since 1917, it continues to deepen and expand and now encompasses assorted variations. A good number of MPB artists have also added greatly to contemporary samba with their innovative songwriting and mixing of styles. The musicianship and festive spirit of the original *pagodeiros* from Ramos (Zeca Pagodinho, Fundo de Quintal and others) as well as the thundering percussive interplay of Rio's samba schools have added to the style's enduring appeal and helped spread its rhythms around the globe. Outside of Brazil, large samba schools and *blocos* now number in the hundreds worldwide.

Most of the artists interviewed in this book were key players in this extraordinary era for Brazilian music. In addition, I have included a few representatives of later generations who speak about some of the many dance and/or pop-oriented Brazilian styles that enthralled overseas audiences (especially in Europe) from the '80s through the '00s. Below is a look at who is interviewed in this book and why they are included.

*Antonio Carlos Jobim* wrote bossa nova's greatest standards and provided the melodic and harmonic underpinnings of the genre. Jobim composed enduring tunes of remarkable lyricism, musical economy, and harmonic sophistication. His most famous hit (of many) was "Garota de Ipanema" (The Girl from Ipanema), which is one of the best-known songs in the world. As Jobim argued, bossa nova had a huge impact on American popular music and jazz; it was both a source of repertoire and a style incorporated into many new compositions. In addition, the guitar would be reinvigorated as a jazz instrument in part because of the inspired playing of several Brazilian guitarists who often recorded bossa songs.

*Laurindo Almeida*, the winner of seven Grammy awards and another eleven nominations, was one of those guitarists; Almeida was from an older generation and had previously been involved in what were arguably the first "jazz samba" and

"Brazilian jazz" recordings; he also made many of the first international recordings of Brazilian composers in choro, classical music and other areas. *Oscar Castro-Neves* was part of the early bossa nova scene in Rio and since then has been heavily involved in the presentation of Brazilian music to the world through his work as a guitarist, composer, and arranger based in Los Angeles. *Leny Andrade* is a female vocalist who has long been one of the great interpreters of jazz, as well as bossa, in Brazil. *Sérgio Mendes* mixed bossa nova, MPB and pop in his own trademark sound and was the biggest selling Brazilian recording artist outside of Brazil for many years, beginning with a string of gold records in the late '60s. He stepped outside of his usual territory with musical explorations like *Brasileiro* with Bahia's Carlinhos Brown in 1992 (an album discussed at length in the Mendes interviews in this book) and *Timeless* with hip-hop artist Will.i.am (of the Black Eyed Peas) in 2006.

Bossa nova opened the gates for a full-scale invasion of North America by Brazilian musicians. One of the noteworthy artists who headed North was *Airto Moreira*, who profoundly altered the percussionist's role in jazz and popular music; participated in the birth of jazz fusion with Miles Davis, Weather Report and Return to Forever; and was part of many notable "world music" percussion albums with the likes of the Grateful Dead's Mickey Hart. The singular composer Hermeto Pascoal, one of Brazil's most important figures in jazz and instrumental music, played with Airto, Flora Purim and Miles Davis, and one of his band members—*Jovino Santos Neto*—became a successful solo instrumental artist (pursuing "universal music"), established a parallel career as a music professor in Seattle, and has been working to preserve Pascoal's vast legacy of work.

MPB followed bossa nova in Brazil and was an acronym for *música popular brasileira*. It refers to the music of a generation of Brazilian artists whose music defies easy categorization, and those who have followed in their footsteps. It is eclectic, varying greatly in style from artist to artist, and developed from a collision of bossa nova, regional folk music, protest songs, samba, rock and roll, and other influences. The popular music that they created is among the best ever produced by one generation in any country in the world.

*Antonio Adolfo* and *Dori Caymmi* were still in their teens when bossa was born but played with many of its key figures. Both helped shape the new category of MPB with their mixtures of regional music (such as *toada*) with sophisticated chords. Caymmi arranged or produced songs on many important early MPB albums, established himself as an important Brazilian composer, and later settled in the U.S. and won many Grammy nominations and Latin Grammy awards. Adolfo wrote several hit songs during the festival era and is an influential instrumental musician, exploring jazz, choro, MPB and other styles. He also founded an important music school that now has branches in both Rio and Florida.

The music festivals in Brazil in the '60s helped launch the careers of many MPB artists—including *Milton Nascimento*, *Gilberto Gil*, and *Ivan Lins*—either through their own appearances or the performances of their songs by others. Nascimento and Lins are arguably the two greatest Brazilian composers in terms of melody and harmony after Jobim, and international jazz musicians have widely recorded their compositions. Both released several albums in the U.S. market in the '80s, as did *Djavan*, which helped expose their songwriting overseas to a wider

range of both musicians and fans (especially in the jazz realm). Djavan's tunes have been an overwhelming choice for cover material for solo artists performing in Brazil in recent decades and he has retained his immense popularity in the new century. *João Bosco* is another gifted singer-songwriter, although far less known outside of Brazil. He is a supremely entertaining performer, a vocal and guitar virtuoso who has written many MPB standards as well as notable modern sambas.

Gilberto Gil was a leader of the influential Tropicália music movement, another significant part of MPB, and has brilliantly fused Bahian regional styles (*baião*, *capoeira*, *afoxé*, and more), bossa, and samba with rock, reggae, and other forms. His friend, the vocalist *Gal Costa*, was an important *tropicalista* participant and went on to become one of Brazil's great MPB singers and a model for many female vocalists to follow. The very talented MPB figures *Alceu Valença* and *Geraldo Azevedo*, like Gil, mixed regional elements from the Northeast with foreign styles and created organic "world music" fusions long before famous U.S. and U.K. stars recorded with Brazilian and African musicians.

*Alcione* is a vocalist who was considered part of the "big three" female samba vocalists of the late twentieth century along with Beth Carvalho and the late Clara Nunes. Alcione is still highly popular and also well known for her recordings of various other styles (from *farró* and *bumba-meu-boi* to romantic torch songs). *Bezerra da Silva* became popular recording *partido alto* sambas with acute, uncensored and often funny lyrics about hard life in the favelas; his was a type of "gangsta samba" that some Brazilian critics called *sambandido* (bandit samba) that dealt with racism, police brutality and outlaws long before they were topics for current Brazilian rap and funk.

*Rildo Hora* has been samba's most successful producer for decades now and helped launch what came to be known as pagode (the work of Zeca Pagodinho, Fundo de Quintal and others); his albums with Zeca won four Latin Grammy awards from 2000 to 2007. He has further popularized samba through the *Casa de Samba* and *Cidade do Samba* releases, and has been an integral part of the careers of many other sambistas, including *Dudu Nobre* and others from a younger generation.

Guitarist *Ricardo Silveira* and keyboardist *Rique Pantoja* are two notable figures from Brazilian jazz, especially of the fusion variety. Both were in high demand early in their careers as studio musicians on many albums by leading MPB artists. Silveira also released a string of albums on Verve in the U.S. that made him a popular "smooth jazz" performer, while Pantoja was a co-founder of the Brazilian fusion ensemble Cama de Gato and has pursued a wide-ranging career that has ranged across jazz, instrumental music and inspirational music.

*Herbert Vianna* is the leader of the Paralamas do Sucesso, one of the highly successful Brazilian bands that emerged in the '80s as rock became a commercial force in the music business. The Paralamas were the most musically talented group of their generation and have created compelling blends of rock, reggae and ska, other Caribbean styles, and Brazilian regional music. The band, which has been praised by the likes of Gilberto Gil, is in many ways a bridge between MPB and contemporary Brazilian rock and pop.

Over the last three decades, Brazilian music has also generated various new styles (including *lambada*, *axé music* and *funk carioca*) that have had large regional

audiences as well as many fans in European dance clubs. In the twenty-first century, *Fernanda Porto* has achieved success with mixtures of samba and bossa with drum 'n' bass and other electronica; and her remix of Jobim's "Só Tinha que Ser com Você" with DJ Patife and DJ Marky helped introduce new audiences to Jobim in the new century.

*Guitarrada*, the instrumental form of *lambada*, was another Brazilian style that emerged in the late '70s; it was created in and near Belém, in the Amazon region, and was incorporated into *brega pop* (or *brega pareense*), a style best exemplified by Banda Calypso, Brazil's most popular independent act of the new millennium. And artists from Belém have transformed *brega pop* into *tecnobrega*, the latest dance-floor export from Brazil. Vocalist Lázaro Magalhães, guitarist Pio Lobato, and bassist Bruno Rabelo are three musicians from Belém and their band Cravo Carbone, which broke up in 2008, augmented rock with a multitude of styles, including *guitarrada* and *tecnobrega*; the three artists are articulate analysts of the current regional and urban music of their city and state. Belém's busy musical scene, which has seen the creation of various new musical forms and a new type of music-business paradigm over the last few decades, is emblematic of the nonstop experimentation and hybridization that are typical of Brazilian music.