



ELIANE ELIAS

Bossa nova turns 50 this year, with the official birth date hearkening back to Brazil in 1958 when guitarist João Gilberto recorded Antonio Carlos Jobim and Vinicius de Moraes's seminal "Chega de Saudade." With Gilberto's new samba-derived rhythm and soft-spoken, non-vibrato vocals, the song helped to launch a movement of a new sound that melded seductive Brazilian rhythms with jazz and European classical harmony. In celebration of the silver anniversary, Brazil-born, New York-based vocalist/pianist Eliane Elias lovingly pays tribute to the music of her homeland with [Bossa Nova Stories](#), a sublime 14-tune collection that captures the cool and alluring spirit of bossa nova. It's the 21st recording of her career and the follow-up to the acclaimed [Something for You: Eliane Elias Sings and Plays Bill Evans](#) that was released earlier this year on Blue Note Records.

Eliane's singing, integrated with her piano, makes her a unique interpreter of melody and song. On [Bossa Nova Stories](#), her vocal delivery is a marvel of rhythmic freedom, swinging beautifully and wonderfully integrated with the syncopations of her piano, or in counterpoint to the rhythm of the guitar. This is a true musician singing. Her voice, vocal phrasing, feel and interpretation place her at the top of this genre.

For this recording, she leads a top-notch band, all of whom are steeped in the bossa nova tradition, including guitarist Oscar Castro-Neves, drummer Paulo Braga and bassist Marc Johnson. Guests include harmonica legend Toots Thielemans, Brazilian post-bossa singer/songwriter Ivan Lins and up and coming guitarist Ricardo Vogt. Produced by Elias and Steve Rodby, the album also features seven tracks with full orchestration beautifully arranged and conducted by Rob Mathes, and recorded at Abbey Road Studios, in London.

"I grew up in Sao Paulo in the '60s, hearing the bossa nova which was all around us," says Elias. "This was the popular music of our day, with its infectious rhythm and poetic lyrics. It was romantic, cool, jazzy, sensuous. I lived and breathed this music. It's in my DNA."

The music features classic bossa nova tracks including "The Girl From Ipanema," "Desafinado" "Chega de Saudade" and "Minha Saudade," as well as standards given the bossa treatment (two Johnny Mercer numbers, "Too Marvelous for Words" and "Day In and Day Out," and the Gershwin chestnut "You Can't Take That Away From Me"). "To include American standards is in keeping with the tradition of the bossa nova legends, specifically João Gilberto, who recorded so many songs by classic American composers," says Elias. "The bossa nova composers were very influenced by the popular music coming out of the States in the 40's and 50's." In addition, there are two new standards fortified by bossa: Stevie Wonder's "Superwoman" and "The More I See You," made into a pop-music hit in 1966 by Chris Montez.

While [Something for You](#) showcased Elias' piano prowess—buoyed by lively swing, balladic romanticism, studied virtuosity—[Bossa Nova Stories](#) trains the spotlight on her marvelous vocal talent while also demonstrating her unique pianistic mastery of Brazilian and Latin rhythms.

As the most distinctive style of song form to arrive in the late '50s and early '60s, bossa nova offered a fresh and lyrical alternative to post-bop and avant-garde jazz that dominated the scene at the time. Bossa nova took Brazil by storm, with the rest of the world being swept up into the hypnotic groove thanks in part to the 1959 film *Black Orpheus* (with the music composed by Jobim and Luiz Bonfá) and the 1962 hit, "The Girl From Ipanema," penned by Jobim, Moraes and Norman Gimbel. Since then, bossa nova has become part of the musical mainstream and has served as the fount of inspiration for numerous albums, from Frank Sinatra's first collaboration with Jobim in 1967 (the Claus Ogerman-orchestrated [Francis Albert Sinatra & Antonio Carlos Jobim](#)) to this year's Carly Simon bossa-inflected album [This Kind of Love](#).

As a child, bossa nova was Elias' daily bread. While she was a classically trained pianist who also studied the music of Bud Powell and Art Tatum, she says, "My story is so intertwined with bossa nova. When I was five years old, I used to watch a TV show called *O Fino da Bossa*, led by Elis Regina, accompanied by the Zimbo Trio whose pianist, Amilton Godoy, coincidentally became my teacher a few years later."

From age 17 to 20, Elias worked with Vinicius de Moraes, one of bossa nova's greatest composers. "I still remember the many rehearsals with him at my parents' house and the three years of extensive touring with him," she says. "During those years, I met Jobim several times"

Fast forward to 1989 when Elias recorded her [Plays Jobim](#) album for Blue Note. So impressed was the composer, that in 1995 when he fell ill shortly before Joe Henderson began recording his album [Double Rainbow: Music of Jobim](#), he

recommended her as his piano substitute. "That was a blessing from Jobim" she says. "He loved what I did and stressed that my involvement gave the music authenticity and continuity. He trusted me." Also on the CD were Castro-Neves and Braga who reunited with her and Johnson for her Sings Jobim album on Blue Note in 1998.

Regarding Oscar Castro-Neves, one of the bossa nova pioneers, Elias says, "We have a close affinity rhythmically. Playing piano and guitar can be tricky. The harmony has to be in agreement (voicings and chord tensions), but also the rhythm. We feel the subdivisions of the beat the same." As for Braga, who played with Jobim for 15 years as well as Lins, Djavan and Milton Nascimento, she says, "He's the father of modern Brazilian drums. Paulo's playing is superb. His beat is never static, always has motion, and he brings so much added dimension and feel to the music in his looseness and improvisational qualities within the formal structures." And while Johnson is not Brazilian, his history with Elias counts for a lot, she says. "Marc has been playing music with me for 21 years, really living this music and has assimilated much of the Brazilian vocabulary. He has a great feel and a beautiful sound."

The following are Elias' thumbnail sketches of the Bossa Nova Stories songbook:

- **"The Girl From Ipanema"**—"The most well-known Brazilian song all over the world. I have recorded two versions before: an instrumental and one sung in Portuguese. This arrangement brings together iconic elements of several historic recordings of this song. The orchestral opening is based on the Gilberto/Stam Getz recording, the English and Portuguese singing nods to the Sinatra with Jobim collaboration, and my piano solo is a paraphrase of Jobim's own piano chord voicing and phrasing from his The Composer Plays album."
- **"Chega de Saudade"**—"I played this a lot in concerts with Vinicius from 1977 to '80 and it continues as part of my concert repertoire to this day. This arrangement features the beautiful playing of Oscar, and the piano solo is a transcription of Jobim's solo from The Composer Plays."
- **"The More I See You"**—"I absolutely love this song. It's a great vehicle for bossa nova. I was familiar with the Chet Baker version and wanted to sing this because I love the lyric."
- **"They Can't Take That Away From Me"**—"This is one of the great Gershwin's compositions and doing it as a bossa created a different space and feel for the lyric. I chose a slow tempo, an intimate and romantic interpretation."
- **"Desafinado"**—"It literally means out of tune or off-key. With its intricate melody, harmonies and turns, it's a challenging song to sing and play. Ironically, one must have great intonation to sing the 'off-key' song. It has been the closing song at most of my shows. I love the changes which are great for improvisation and for traveling and opening up."
- **"Estate" (Summer)**—"João Gilberto recorded this song on his classic Amoroso album with arrangements by Claus Ogerman. João is perhaps the only non-Italian to turn an Italian song into a worldwide bossa nova standard. The lyric, sung in Italian, speaks about a lost love in a very poetic way. I created different colors and lifts throughout the song by modulating the verses as well as when the harmonica solo enters. It was very touching for me to witness Toots Thielemans recording this at age 85. He sounded beautiful."
- **"Day In Day Out"**—"It's a piano and guitar duet accompanying vocal, joined by percussion. This features my percussive and rhythmical right hand with my left hand functioning as a sambista bass player. I always wanted to record this tune and had this arranged a few years ago, waiting for the right opportunity to record it "
- **"I'm Not Alone"**—"Ivan Lins and I have performed together a bit since 1992. This is such a beautiful song, and I love the moment when Ivan's voice comes in answering mine in a duet."
- **"Too Marvelous For Words"**—"The song is romantic, and the Johnny Mercer lyrics are quite sophisticated. Harmonically the song goes through interesting shifts of key; it is an example of great song construction."
- **"Superwoman"**—"I always liked this tune and I love Stevie's writing. As a nod to Stevie's harmonica playing, Toots Thielemans plays on the intro and the ending. Rock music has a straight eighth-note feel that lends itself easily to a Brazilian feel."
- **"Falsa Baiana"**—"João Gilberto used to listen to Geraldo Pereira's compositions on the speakers of the main plaza of his little town in Bahia called Juazeiro. João recorded this song in 1976 on Stan Getz's recording with Jobim, The Best of Two Worlds. Geraldo was a composer who purposely looked to create rhythm with the combination of sounds of the words. This was one of the first Brazilian songs I learned to play when I was 10 years old and recording it on this CD was really fun."
- **"Minha Saudade"**—"Co-written with João Gilberto, it was João Donato's first hit in 1958 and another song from bossa nova's first year. And check out Marc's bass on this track. It really grooves."
- **"A Ra" (The Frog)**—"Some of João Donato's compositions, like this one, introduced an original rhythm, somewhat a mix of Brazilian and Latin grooves. The lyrics were written by Caetano Veloso."
- **"Day by Day"**—"Another beautiful romantic song. In the ending tag of this arrangement, my piano quotes 'The Girl From Ipanema' as a nice bookend to these stories."

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