

Like the Bossa Nova, love should swing.

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I've written a lot of personal ads on Spring Street Networks, the people you log in to when you peruse the personals at Nerve.com, TheOnion.com, LA Weekly, TelevisionWithoutPity.com, et cetera. My ads were premised on the fact that the personal ads are an ideal medium for fun, yet people just wind up talking about how they're good in bed. Here's a blogworthy one entitled: 'bossa_nova':

Song or album that puts me in the mood Arto Lindsay – O Corpo Sutil (the subtle body)
Joao Gilberto – The legendary Joao Gilberto
Verve's Antonio Carlos Jobim Songbook

Why you should get to know me I always hate it when somebody I've just met asks me what kind of music I like. As David Byrne points out, 'Everybody says they like music', but I've found that everybody who asks me such a question has no interest in the answer and just thinks it's somehow better than asking me what I do for a living. So I tell them I like bossa nova. This always stops them cold and lets me change the subject to something more interesting, like the increase in the death rate of illegal migrants crossing the Arizona/Mexico border or something.

But I do like the bossa nova, and I think it gets a bad rap among the musically ignorant. So let me tell you why it's a wonderful thing.

First, *bossa nova* is Portugese for 'new beat'. Yes, there's a beat, and it's the crux of the music. It's subtle, but listen for it in the guitar, or in the cymbals the drummer is nonchalantly brushing. Wedding bands and lounge pianists miss it all the frigging time, and of all the covers of 'the Girl From Ipanema' I've heard, only about two weren't in 4/4 time. So you've got this beat that's pretty darn danceable, not too far from samba, but it's subdued and doesn't hit you over the head, leaving half of you wanting to dance and half of you wanting to kick back and go 'aaah'.

Portugese has a word missing from English: 'saudade', meaning 'an enjoyable sadness' [No, not 'nostalgia', which a Portugese/English dictionary or two have claimed; and not 'melancholy', which we often use in this respect, but which the OED tells us is not enjoyable.] That's what the Bossa Nova really gets at,

by being quiet but not maudlin. Not to get all Whorfian, but the fact that the word is missing is closely related to the fact that English music just doesn't aim for such a state, and rarely stumbles upon it.

More about what I am looking for Then there are the lyrics. Fortunately, I don't need to wax all descriptive about the lyrics; instead, I'll just give you some opening lines:

'How insensitive/ I must have seemed/ when she told me that she loves me.'

'The samba from my land is a beautiful thing./ He who does not love the samba is a bad person,/ who is fucked in the head,/ fucked in the feet,/ or both.'

'Dawn has broken./ Soon you will abandon me.'

'Recall your first look at the sea./ Let the music tell you who you are.'

Really, how can you not love this stuff. I acknowledge that the Bossa has a dark side, usually found in elevators and airports, populated by flutes and syrupy strings, often omitting the lyrics and most of the beat entirely. But the good stuff so stands out that it's often worth the price of the album for those tracks that hit the beat and the lyrics just right (e.g., Bebel Gilberto's *Tanto Tiempo* is saved by her cover of Samba da Bencao.)

That's the most of it. The rest, like the genealogy, the link to Jazz ("I wasn't influenced by American Jazz, I influenced it." –Jobim), and so forth, I'll save for the annoying people at the party.