

Bossa nova.

A musical style of Brazilian origin blending elements of the samba and cool jazz. It was popular in the USA in the 1960s, but many bossa nova tunes have become staple to the jazz repertory. Bossa nova music is subdued, and its challenging harmonies have elicited fine improvisations. In a typical song, a drummer and an acoustic guitarist superimpose soft, precise ternary figures on a duple meter. Characteristically, light syncopations delivered by a saxophonist or singer with a vibrato-free, breathy, quiet tone permeate the melody. 7th and 9th chords, rapid modulations, and major–minor alternations are common; lyrics, if present, are generally sung in Portuguese or English and convey bittersweet sentiments.

Bossa nova probably began in Brazil with João Gilberto's recording of Antonio Carlos Jobim's composition *Chega da saudade* (1958). The guitarist Charlie Byrd, having visited Brazil, initiated the bossa nova craze in the USA through his recording with Stan Getz, *Jazz Samba* (1962), which included Jobim's *Desafinado*. Jazz recording companies, in attempting to cash in on Getz's Grammy award-winning success, produced a disastrous concert at Carnegie Hall in November 1962 and numerous mediocre recordings, but neither failures in jazz nor distortions in pop (e.g., Eydie Gorme's 1963 hit *Blame it on the Bossa Nova*) destroyed the original style. João and Astrud Gilberto's rendition of Jobim's *The Girl from Ipanema* (on the album *Getz/Gilberto*, 1963, Verve 68545) was the milestone among a number of other excellent recordings in the bossa nova style in the mid-1960s; from a jazz perspective, Getz's performance on this album was outstanding; he had an uncanny ability to bring depth and substance to the style while avoiding its potential sugary quality.

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The following is a typical bossa nova comping pattern for the guitar:

Musical notation for guitar comping pattern in 4/4 time. The staff shows a repetitive rhythmic pattern of chords: C6/C, G13, C6/C, G13. The pattern is: C6/C (quarter), G13 (quarter), C6/C (quarter), G13 (quarter), C6/C (quarter), G13 (quarter), C6/C (quarter), G13 (quarter), C6/C (quarter), G13 (quarter), C6/C (quarter), G13 (quarter), C6/C (quarter), G13 (quarter), C6/C (quarter), G13 (quarter).

Note the repetitive pattern. This helps to “lock in” the groove of the bossa nova.

The bass figure for the bossa nova is built around the root and the fifth:

Musical notation for bass figure in 4/4 time. The staff shows a repetitive rhythmic pattern of notes: C6/C, G13, C6/C, G13. The pattern is: C6/C (quarter), G13 (quarter), C6/C (quarter), G13 (quarter), C6/C (quarter), G13 (quarter), C6/C (quarter), G13 (quarter), C6/C (quarter), G13 (quarter), C6/C (quarter), G13 (quarter), C6/C (quarter), G13 (quarter), C6/C (quarter), G13 (quarter).

The repetition of this figure clearly establishes the relationship between the tonic and the dominant.

The piano comping pattern should be much simpler. Doing so creates a sense of rhythmic space and contrast in the rhythm section.

Musical notation for piano comping pattern in 4/4 time. The staff shows a simple chordal pattern: C6/C, G13, C6/C, G13. The pattern is: C6/C (quarter), G13 (quarter), C6/C (quarter), G13 (quarter), C6/C (quarter), G13 (quarter), C6/C (quarter), G13 (quarter), C6/C (quarter), G13 (quarter), C6/C (quarter), G13 (quarter), C6/C (quarter), G13 (quarter), C6/C (quarter), G13 (quarter).

Putting the three instruments together yields the following comping pattern:

Musical notation for combined guitar, piano, and bass comping pattern in 4/4 time. The staff shows the combined rhythmic pattern of chords: C6/C, G13, C6/C, G13. The pattern is: C6/C (quarter), G13 (quarter), C6/C (quarter), G13 (quarter), C6/C (quarter), G13 (quarter), C6/C (quarter), G13 (quarter), C6/C (quarter), G13 (quarter), C6/C (quarter), G13 (quarter), C6/C (quarter), G13 (quarter), C6/C (quarter), G13 (quarter).