

“The Girl from Ipanema”--Stan Getz, Joao Gilberto, Antonio Carlos Jobim, and Astrud Gilberto (1963)

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Essay by Glenn Zottola (guest essay)*



Stan Getz



Early label



Astrud Gilberto

In the 1960s--a very turbulent time in America--Stan Getz released “The Girl from Ipanema.” This became a huge hit both nationwide and worldwide. Who would have thought such gentle, lyrical music would catch the ear and emotion of a country in unrest? It also allowed Stan Getz, a jazz great, to cross over to AM radio--one of the few times any jazz artist was able to make that major transition.

It all started when guitarist Charlie Byrd went to Brazil on a State Department-sponsored tour and, there, fell in love with the local music. Inspired, he asked Stan Getz to collaborate with him on an album. Brazilian composers like Antonio Carlos Jobim were listening to West Coast Jazz from California, pioneered by Stan Getz and others. This new jazz was subtle, cool and “understated” in Stan Getz’s words. That understated cool jazz caught the ear of Antonio Carlos Jobim, who wrote “The Girl from Ipanema.” This was very different from the earlier “hot” jazz of the 1940s.

These Brazilian composers incorporated that subtle concept from America into their compositions and music. This gave birth to Bossa Nova which literally means “New Trend” or “New Wave.” This music was perfect for Stan to adapt his jazz concept. He created a fusion as he was always a very melodic and lyrical player with a beautiful mellow sound much like such vocalists as Brazilian great, Joao Gilberto. Stan went into the studio with Jobim and Joao Gilberto to do a ground-breaking record, called “Getz/Gilberto.” Joao’s wife, Astrud, who was not a professional singer at the time, was added to the session to sing a few songs in English. One song being “The Girl from Ipanema,” which became a number one hit.

And so the stage was set for a musical revolution in America. Stan’s sound and concept of jazz was a perfect match and blend for the Brazilian vocal approach and Bossa Nova rhythm.

Stan Getz was a virtuoso of the saxophone but even beyond that, he created beauty. When jazz became more free and aggressive in the 60s, he never wavered from creating beauty and lyricism. In his own words Stan said, “No matter how complicated improvisation gets it still is a melody.” This concept of melody and telling a story when you improvise is a deep and timeless tradition in jazz, passed down by the masters of the “golden age of jazz” which was a true renaissance from 1920 to 1950. If there is one thing this renaissance had, it was lyricism along with swing. Stan Getz was one of the most lyrical jazz players of all time.

It is this concept of creating beauty and telling a story when you improvise that attracted me to jazz from the very beginning and has carried me through my entire career. I think it makes the world a better place.

Glenn Zottola has been a working musician since the age of 13. He has over 30 jazz albums to his credit and has performed at the Kool Jazz Festival, The Hague and at Carnegie Hall. He maintains his own website, www.glennzottola.com.

* The views expressed in this essay are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Library of Congress.