

My Bossa Nova Years

by Con Chapman

It is no coincidence that the *bossa nova* craze coincided with the years in which I achieved my greatest romantic success--first through sixth grades. No music is better suited to inspire thoughts of love than that associated with the Portuguese term translated roughly as "the new thing or trend or fashionable wave or something."



It was perhaps the fates who decreed it--they have had nothing to do since the demise of the ancient Greeks! I was prepared as no other boy in my elementary school for the coming of the complex harmonies and soft percussive accents of the sound that evolved from the Brazilian samba and swept through the world like a contagion, for I had learned the *cha-cha-cha* at numerous country club affairs dancing with my younger sister!



I know, this smacks of incest, but we knew "when to say when" when it came to this most ancient and honorable of taboos, having been cautioned by our older sister of the "Hapsburg" lip--the product of inbreeding among the royal families of Europe. "You two keep that up," she said to us sternly when she found us practicing in the front parlor, "you're going to get underslung jaws like Charles II."



Charles II

One look at the picture of the unfortunate heir to the Spanish crown in her ninth grade biology book was enough to warn us off. "It is time that you took the skills I have conveyed to you," my younger sister said, "and go ask Margaret Shoe to dance. She already looks like Charles II."

The *bossa nova* craze lasted only six years, but oh what a half-a-dozen it wozen! There were the quiet nights and quiet stars and the quiet chords from my guitar, a rental until I proved to my dad that I was firmly committed to my art and would not lose interest in it, the way I had with the guppies and the rock collection. And baseball and the coin collection.

The British are coming!

It was a race against time; I had to progress from rank novice to sultry-voiced master before *bossa nova* was obliterated by the British Invasion in 1964. I took guitar lessons from a flatulent local teen who would go on to the Berklee School of Music in Boston. When he was sick, his replacement was the owner of the music studio, a corpulent woman who looked like Patsy Cline without the makeup. And with maybe sixty, seventy extra pounds on her frame.



Patsy Cline

There was the fruitless search for an instructor in Portuguese in the small midwestern town where we lived. Every week I would check the Yellow Pages: Plumbers, Porch swings, Printers, Psychologists--nothing. Then turn to "Language Instruction." English, French, Latin, Moravian, Russian, Spanish--no *Portuguesa!*

Finally, my *picaresque* quest--and try saying *that* five times fast--ended in the ridiculous, not the sublime, as such tales so often do. Trudy Espinosa, the daughter of an Air Force colonel on temporary assignment to install intercontinental ballistic missiles bearing nuclear warheads in silos deep beneath the rich soil of our town, held a party in a temporary teen center for the children of the operatives assigned to this top-secret but widely-known assignment. Located in a double-wide trailer, *los cento de teenos* was gaily decorated with crepe paper and Japanese lanterns, but I--I had already given my heart to Martha Stretz!



Teen center fun!

A *bossa nova* singer cannot woo two women at once--the fingering on the guitar is too complex, and the side-to-side movement of the head as you croon to two *inamoratas* aggravated the whiplash injury that I had sustained in Pop Warner football practice.

I stood up, vanquished by the CMaj7 chord. "Trudy," I said sadly, "I am sorry--I already have a girl from Ipanema."



"Who is she?" Trudy demanded, her eyes beginning to redden, the storm clouds that announced a torrent of tears was on its way. It was, after all, her party, and she could cry if she wanted to.

Just then Martha Stretz passed, and when she passed, I couldn't help but go . . . ah.



I blame it on the *bossa nova*--with its magic spell.

