



Bossa Nova

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General Characteristics

- Simple melodies.
- Complex harmony.
- Simple underlying rhythmic pulse.
- Complex syncopated accents over this.
- ‘Lazy way of playing’ i.e. behind the beat, but in-tempo.
- Singers sing slightly flat, with a soft sound. Mellow and warm – think Astrid Gilberto, NOT Ella Fitzgerald ! Instrumentalists, likewise.
- Mood varies from manic to depressive – not much in between !

Rhythm

- Pulse is on ‘1’ and ‘3’, NOT on ‘2’ and ‘4’ as is usual in jazz.
- The ‘1’ and ‘3’ beats are often anticipated with a beat a quarter note before i.e.

& 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 etc
 ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^

- Hi-hat, cymbal, or other percussion play 8 to the bar over this.
- Rim shot, wood-block, or other percussion play a 2-bar pattern of accents over this. There are many variations, but here are some examples :-

& 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 etc
 ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^

& 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 etc
 ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^

& 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & 1 etc
 ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^ ^

May switch between such patterns all the time, maintaining the ‘feel’.

- Guitar and keyboard intersperse these accents with punctuated chords based on the phrasing of the melody.
- Play bass line (root to 5th will do) on lower strings with thumb, accenting '1' and '3', whilst fingers pick 2 or 3 of upper strings to form chord, and play accented beats.

Harmony

- 'Fewest notes, least movement' in chord progressions is a good rule for jazz, but is especially applicable in Bossa Nova.
- Roots move in semitone, 5th and 4th steps. Occasionally m3rds or semitones e.g. bridge of 'Girl From Ipanema'.
- 7th chords are nearly always embellished with #5, b5, #9, b9, 11th, 13th, and these added notes are :
 - sometimes the melody notes
 - sometimes static whilst the chords change underneath e.g 'One Note Samba'.
- Complex chord substitutions are used. Here are some examples for II/V/I :-:

Dm7	G7	C
Dm9	G13	CM7
Dm9	Gb9b13	CM7
Dm9	G/F	CM7
Fm9	G/F	CM7
D9	Db7b9	CM7
Dm7b5	G7(13)b9	Cm
Fm9	G7b9	CM7

Dm7	G7	C
D9	G13	CM7
Am6	Abdim	CM7
Dm9	Db7b9	CM7
F/G	G13b9	CM9
F#m7	Fm6	CM7
Ab13	G7b9	CM7
DbM9	Bdim	CM7

- Practice II/V/I, and substitutions, round cycle of fifths to develop facility in all keys. Experiment with different inversions (shapes) of the chords to get upper voice moving, or static - both can be effective.
- Other substitutions :
 - CM7 to Em7
 - Cm7 to EbM7
 - Dm7 to FM7
 - Dm7b5 to Fm7
 - G7 to Bm7b5
 - G7 to Bdim

- Use passing chords :-

I CM7 / / / I FM7 / / / I

becomes

I CM7 / Dm7Em7 I FM7 / / / I

Melody

- Often appears to be derived from chord sequence, rather than the other way around.
- Usually simple, but can be highly syncopated.
- Often, the upper voice of the chord.

Listening

Anything by Antonio Carlos Jobim, Jao Gilberto, Luis Bonfa, Vinicius De Moraes.

Bossa Nova applied by non-Brazilian jazz musicians can work e.g. Stan Getz, but there are many disasters. Go for the real thing !

Repertoire

The Girl From Ipanema
 Quiet Nights/Corcovado
 How Insensitive
 Meditation
 One Note Samba
 Manha De Carnival/Morning Of The Carnival/Black Orpheus
 Desafinado
 Dindi
 Once I Loved
 Wave
 Chega De Saudade/No More Blues
 O Grand Amor
 etc.

Learning

Lots of music books (try Denmark St shops in London). Finger-style orientated.
 Jack Marshall book (if you can find it).
 Secrets of Brazilian Music' by Antonio Adolfo videotape with booklet is excellent.