

Inspiring Bossa Nova

A Study of Villa-lobos influence on Antonio Carlos Jobim

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Research paper on Villa-lobos influences on Antonio Carlos Jobim

Antonio Carlos Jobim, also known as Tom Jobim, is one of the most if not the most well-known Brazilian Musician. He is so important that even the Brazil Olympic dedicated a session of the opening ceremony to him, which leads into the showcases of their pop music culture. Thus, according to the narrator of the ceremony, his composition “The girl from Ipanema” is the second most world-known song in the world (see 38’00” from Olympic, 2016). Jobim influence stretch outside of Brazil, as he is one of the inventors of the new genre Bossa Nova.

Since he is such a pioneer in the field of Jazz, and having his peek period working with Jazz musician like Frank Sinatra and João Gilberto. Normal listener might think that, he was heavily influenced by jazz musician, just like Louis Armstrong, whom have his root traced back to Joe “king” Oliver and Freddie Keppard. That however is certainly not true, as he started the path of music with Joachim Koellreutter, a musicologist who is more focused in serialism and other contemporary works of the classical field. Studying piano with Koellreutter, Jobim was exposed to a wide range of classical composers, such as Chopin, Debussy and Ravel. Amongst this list of repeatable composers, Hector Villa-lobos is the most influential to Jobim. His son, Paulo Jobim, once wrote that, Antonio often denies suggestion that his Bossa Nova have any influenced from the Jazz world, and stressing that its Bossa Nova not Samba Jazz, and Antonio’s music is heavily influenced by Villa-lobos (Jobim and Jobim, 2007). Although Jobim’s music was influenced by many and could be consider eclectic as Freeman (2006) suggested, due to the limitation on the size of this paper, we will be focusing on the how Villa-lobos had influenced Antonio Jobim’s music and his career.

One’s beliefs and philosophies would heavily impact his/her compositions. Villa-lobos’s thinks that “art must be national in character but universal in its groundwork and must reach the majority of the people.” (Freeman, 2006). Having this definition of art music, Villa-lobos becomes one of the most influence nationalistic composer of Brazil, whom had also vaguely defined the cultural song form “Choro” with his 16 works of Choro series. Thanks to political situation in the 30s – 40s. The need of nationalistic music and art had built a supportive environment for the later generation, setting grounds for the development of Bossa Nova and the nationalistic musical in the 60s to 70s. The admiration of Villa-lobos work had Jobim strive to include national aesthetic in his very own composition. Villa-lobos among Koellreutter is also the two musician that helps Jobim breaking the barrier between art music and popular music, as both of them set themselves as an example playing in popular music group (Freeman, 2006). Similar to Villa-lobos, Jobim played piano in night clubs and bars in his early 20s had realised that including popular music as part of their works could effectively enhance the Brazilian characteristic, while allowing his music approachable just like Villa-lobos view on

art music. Hence, he started to implement various elements originated from the pop and folk culture into his composition. Thus, Chediak restates that Villa-Lobos once claimed that two composers must follow his path in music, one of them is Tom Jobim (Jobim and Jobim, 2007).

Other than affecting Tom Jobim's view of art music, hence including the Brazilian aesthetic in their composition, Villa-Lobos also provide a structure, a method for Jobim to follow. A compositional formula that includes not just the Brazilian elements, but also combining the European compositional procedures (Reily, 1996). The two are in fact quite distant from each other. Since the Brazilian folk music has its very improvisational nature (Freeman, 2006). Taking the most popular Brazilian "form", Choro, for instance. Despite researchers analysing 295 pieces of Choro, there is seemingly a small one that follows a formal template, it could be 3 parts, 2 parts or not modulating at all, and features dozens of chord types and harmonic progressions (Moss et al, 2020).

On the other hand, European compositions often have a clear music structure and forms, which often follows a series of compositional methods and harmony guidelines. The groundbreaking results of Villa-Lobos show the path for Jobim to learn to combine the two very different musical traditions as one. This eclectic nature of their composition is also a reflection of their Brazilian background as Brazil has a really diverse population, thus the complex mix of cultures. We could see a lot of mixed compositional techniques from Jobim's work. For instance, "Chega de Saudade" has its opening start with eight measures of instrumental introduction, which is a common practice in Choro. Uses of descending chromatic lines, which is one of the major characteristics of *saudade* in Choros and modinhas (a type of traditional song) while having the harmonic structure based on impressionism, like using major chords with supertonic functions (Reily, 1996; Freeman, 2006).

Many might think that Jobim has his inspiration of tonal ambiguity and parallel movement based on Debussy, as he was exposed to the leading figure of impressionism in his study. Reily (1996) suggested, such connection might be due to superficial analysis. Given Jobim seldom uses the key signature of Debussy, the whole-tone scale. Jobim certainly got inspired by the French impressionist in creating tonal ambiguity, the compositional technique used is more similar to the digested version of Villa-Lobos. Both drifted away from a tonal centre with use of melodic and harmonic parallel movement. Although some might argue that Jobim could have drawn the parallelism from other reputable composers such as Ravel, there are other similarities within Jobim's composition that show a heavy reference of Villa-Lobos' use of harmony.

Freeman (2006) suggested that one of the key harmonic signatures of Jobim's is the "*Melodic Sequence with Non-Sequential Altered Harmonies*". Meaning that the melodic motive is being repeated in sequential motion while the harmony supporting it keep changing, which could be found in many of Jobim's piece like "Não devo sonhar". This contrapuntal relations between harmony and melodic lines is rarely found in other genre than Choro. Of course, this is also one of the techniques that Villa-lobos used, adopting the separational nature between the melody and harmony, which could be found in "Choro No.1". Another major similarity between the two composers is the choice of chord sonority. This is one of the reasons why Reily (1996) disagrees that Jobim based his harmonic inspiration of tonal ambiguity from the French impressionist, Debussy. Other than the fact that Jobim almost never used whole tone scales, but also the clusters from tight chord structure, a main feature in Bossa Nova, suggested that Jobim build his impressionistic technique from Villa-lobos instead.

Freeman (2006) adds to this finding that the similarity of chord sonority between the two composers, was due to Jobim's choice of compositional instrument. Although being a pianist, Jobim did wrote many of his piece with guitar. Thus, the physical limitation of the guitar there are certain restriction on the choice of chord voicing. Yet, with use of open strings, guitar could develop certainly voicing that is not commonly seen on piano. In which, Villa-lobos is extremely well-known for the use of open strings voicing in his composition. Béhague (1994) also suggested that this clusters of sound in Bossa Nova could traces its root to the "Etude No.4" of Villa-lobos, with its chromatic formations and non-resolved harmonies. In fact, it is clear that the Etude have heavily impacted Jobim's choice of harmony, as the voicing in the first 4 measure, are used in some of Jobim's well-known piece such as "Corcovado". Freeman (2006) also added that the classical guitar right hand technique is one of the reasons Bossa Nova's chord voice differs from the electric guitar players whom often pluck with plectrum, which limited them from playing block chords that is cross stringed (i.e., having only the 6, 4,3,2 strings plucked). Another similarity is that both composers, like to use complex chord structure at the final cadences creating an unresolved feeling.

The use of harmony and chord sonority reflect that Jobim's taste of music was heavily influenced by Villa-lobos. Other factors that reflect this, is the use of instrumentation. Although Jobim was more well-known for his Bossa Nova and popular music, he also writes serious orchestral tone poem like "Saudade do Brasil". The piece is a good reference to demonstrate Jobim's similarity on the instrumentation with Villa-lobos. Like "Bachianas Brasileiras No. 5" of Villa-lobos, Jobim's "Saudade do Brasil" uses the female vocal as an instrument, creating lines of melody without actual syllables or lyrics. This is not to mistaken with Onomatopoeia singing or Scat singing, which have an intention to mimic certain non-human sound through a voice (like beatboxing) or have an improvised nature and often rhythmic. The instrumental vocal line Jobim and Villa-lobos have in common is often very

cantabile, just like a violin melody. Their uses of instrumental female voice are quite different from other composer who uses wordless vocal line like Debussy. As Debussy often like to have the instrumental-vocal line blend within the orchestra, and having it to stand out, while Jobim and Villa-lobos' uses are often the top line or the main theme of the whole piece. Thus, separated from other parts.

To conclude, as Paulo Jobim, the son of Anotino Calos Jobim, restating his father that Villa-lobos was the most significant composer whom had influence in Jobim's composition in many ways. First is the aesthetic and philosophy in compositions, having to include the national characteristic such as choros and samba rhythms. Second is the eclectic nature of their compositional structure, including a diverse mix of styles ranging from folk to pop to serious art music. Thirdly is the handling of musical parts, the use of "*Melodic Sequence with Non-Sequential Altered Harmonies*". Fourth is the use harmony, the tonal ambiguity within Jobim's music is more similar to Villa-lobos than to other tone-painting composer like Debussy, as Jobim had barely used the signature whole-tone scales but creating the ambiguity through the parallelism of voices, a signature compositional technique of Villa-lobos. In addition, the cluster of sound, created by the close positioned chord sonority. This seemingly to be inspired by Villa-lobos guitar etude, a result of Jobim choosing to write on guitar instead of piano. The use of female vocal as an instrument also reflects that Villa-lobos influenced Jobim's taste of sound. Freeman (2006) did suggest more similarity in the use of between the two composers. Such as 1.) the use of poly rhythms (specifically duple-triple rhythm pattern) and unique rhythm accent that he believes leads to the invention of the Bossa Nova rhythms. 2.) The use of pedal tones. 3.) The use of statics and shifting of musical materials. 4.) Descending minor second motive. 5.) Transposed motive repetition. 6.) The melodic contour. However, due to the limitation of this paper, we are not able to discuss each of these characteristics in detail like his doctorate thesis. Thus, there are very limited resource and musical analysis did to thoroughly study the correlations between the two composers, especially when both of them draw inspiration from many different sources, ranging from non-structural Brazilian folk music to European impressionism and serialism. It is extremely difficult to pin point which element of Jobim's music was original and which is inspired from exactly which source, for instance, the use of pedal tones as Freeman (2006) suggested was widely used in the European art music dating back to the baroque period. Although composition reference is extremely complex to be dissect, this paper did illustrate many similarities between Hector Villa-lobos and Antonio Carlos Jobim. Reflecting that Villa-lobos did in fact heavily influenced Jobim more than any other composer, on many levels than simply the compositional approaches, but also the philosophy and aesthetics.

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