

Girl from Ipanema Revisited

Contributed by Brazzil Magazine
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We were 2 years into the project of re-translating some classic bossa nova tunes by Tom Jobim before deciding that we have to tackle "Garota de Ipanema." At first reading, the existing translation from Norman Gimbel has a great lilt to it and is reasonably accurate.

Unlike many translations from the 60's explosion of bossa nova this song starts by following the order and meaning of the original. The translation also does a wonderful job of replacing the open vowels of Portuguese with the harder sounds of English words.

But as I looked further, past the first verse, I thought there was a case for more accuracy. Poetry is not easy to translate, and this Gimbel translation is an absolute classic in its own right, but I thought there was something fundamental worth looking at...

Olha que coisa mais linda, mais cheia de graça,
É ela menina, que vem e que passa
Num doce balanço, caminho do mar
Moça do corpo dourado, do sol de Ipanema, O seu balançado é mais que um poema
É a coisa mais linda que eu já vi passar .

Ah, porque estou tão sozinho, ah, porque tudo é tão triste, ah, a beleza que existe
A beleza que não é só minha, que também passa sozinha
Ah, se ela soubesse, que quando ela passa, O mundo sorrindo se enche de graça
E fica mais lindo, por causa do amor

Chris Slater, a Portuguese translator and keen bossa musician, did a first, literal translation to work from:

Look, what a most pretty thing, most graceful,
She is the girl, who comes, who passes with a sweet swing,
(on the) way to the sea
Girl of a golden body, from the sun of Ipanema, her sway is more than a poem,
it's the prettiest thing that I ever saw go by.

Ah, why am I so alone, Ah, why is everything so sad? Ah the beauty that exists.
The beauty that isn't just mine, That also goes by alone.
Ah, if she knew, that when she passes by, the world fills with grace, smiling,
and becomes more lovely, because of love.

Norman Gimbel chose to return to the opening verse instead of pursuing the full meaning of the second section. This provides some lovely lyrics and rhymes including "But each day when she walks to the sea, she looks straight ahead not at me".

When we were working on many Jobim songs we found it necessary to alter the order of the song's content in order to get the scanning in the right place—and Gimbel's version is a perfect combination of lyric and tune.

But I like what Jobim—and more so Vinicius de Moraes—achieved. An acceptance of the beauty of youth, of men desiring a gorgeous woman...but including the loneliness that desire brings...and then knowing that this beauty is not just for men, for this man or this woman, but for all of us...that a young woman's beauty is part of what makes life worth living.

I have written some unsuccessful songs, had a poem published and was once runner-up in a UK playwriting competition—so am no authority! What I have done with Chris' help is to interpret what is actually there and kept re-writing so that the music and lyric join up.

As a long-time lover of bossa nova I hope this English version adds something to people's pleasure and respect. Regardless of what I think of the song, "Garota de Ipanema" is full of love, longing, sun and sea—the wonderful bossa nova themes.

Garota de Ipanema

Watching so much graceful beauty
The girl who swings so sweetly's walking
As she passes she's only wanting the sea

Dark & gold from Ipanema, poetry cannot describe her
The way she's swaying - the best of swaying I've seen

Why do I have to be lonely?
How do we all become so sad?
Yes she's a thing of such beauty
But her beauty's not there to be owned
As she's walking she's so alone

Does she know that as she's walking
The world is smiling oh so graceful she fills with beauty
Becoming lovely for love

Jobim & de Moraes – translated Adam & Slater

Article written by Mal Adam

Mal Adam and Chris Slater have re-translated some Tom Jobim's songs, which are available on the new CD Nova Jobim from Puratone Recordings. You can listen to selections and buy the CD at <http://www.puratone.co.uk>. Comments are welcome at mal@puratone.co.uk.