

Cunha trades psychology for beautiful Brazilian rhythms

Roger Levesque

It's all in the grooves.

Brazilian music and jazz have been close cousins ever since Stan Getz, Joao and Astrud Gilberto and Antonio Carlos Jobim started a craze with that hit tune The Girl from Ipanema in the early 1960's. A lot of it has to do with polyrhythms of Brazilian music. Those beautiful, gentle bossa nova and samba grooves just seem to inspire jazzy phrasing and solo improvisations.

You can find out yourself Friday night at 9 when Fernanda Cunha visits Edmonton to sing at Yardbird Suite , fronting a quartet with her pianist Ricardo Rito and two of Edmonton's finest, bassist Mike Lent and drummer Sandro Dominelli. (Tickets are \$ 16 for EJS members, \$20 for guests, in advance from ticket master or at the door)

Cunha (pronounced Cune-ya) is based in Rio de Janeiro, where she grew up surrounded by music in various forms, thanks to her musical family. Her mother, also a singer, stuck with Brazilian music but her father was a jazz lover, so she came to love such vocalists as Sarah Vaughan alongside the Brazilian stars Ivan Lins, Jobim and the Gilbertos.

She sang as a little girl, but grew up to get a University degree in psychology and worked in the field for several years before music beckoned again. Cunha gave her first public performance in Rio in 1997 and says "after that, I could not stop", so she gave up psychology. By 2000 she was ready to take her music to the United States. She stayed for a couple of years, mainly in Cleveland, working solo and as a part of Grupo Brasil, and in 2002 she recorded her debut album there title O tempo e o lugar.

Despite any language barrier, Cunha feels the qualities of Brazilian music have much to offer to the rest of the world. "It's the warmth of the music", she explains, "and the rhythms". The Brazilian rhythms need a good drummer to bring those across".

Arguably, those soft syllables of Portuguese rank among the most romantic languages you could ever choose to sing with.

After her return to Brazil, Cunha was able to follow up on a long held dream: to record the music of two favourite Brazilian singer-songwriters, her aunt Sueli Costa and Johnny Alf. Alf, now 75, is particularly famous for writing one of the first Bossa nova tunes back in the mid-'s50s. The result is a superb 2004 release, Dois corações (or two hearts) which includes guest vocal appearances from both Alf and Costa alongside the excellent backing band.

"I decided to put their songs together on this album when I realized there were similarities in their music. They both wrote songs that are sophisticated and accessible or popular sounding".

Cunha says she will be performing a mix of tunes from her two albums along with songs from various classic Brazilian composers like Jobim and Lins.