

Sound Expertise Season 3:9 –

What Bossa Nova Means with Kaleb Goldschmitt

Transcribed by Andrew Dell'Antonio

Kaleb Goldschmitt 00:00

I remember paging through, and on one page there would be — one cover would be about John Cage. And you're like, What is a jazz magazine doing with John Cage? what's going on there? And then there would be letters complaining about bossa nova inside and then you turn the page and there would be Ornette Coleman. And so I remember really clearly going, Oh my God, it was all happening at the exact same moment.

[music] 00:22

Will Robin 00:22

So one of my early fascinations in grad school was with how music's meaning changes as it travels. In many ways, this is a very obvious point, of course, music would mean different things to different people as it moved through different cultures around the globe. But we, and by we, I mean music scholars, but also listeners and fans, tend to get really hung up on origins, spending our time hunting down original meanings favoring some early, seemingly fixed authentic truth, instead of accepting that meaning is ever changing. And sometimes a change to meaning turns out to be just as significant as the original. That idea might sound a little abstract, but it becomes really specific in the work of ethnomusicologist. Kaleb Goldschmitt, who is Associate Professor of Music at Wellesley College. Kaleb's fascinating 2020 book *Bossa Mundo* examines what it means that bossa nova, despite being rooted in Brazilian culture, had a massive pop culture impact in the English-speaking world in the 1960s and beyond. They raise an important question: what does it mean when a national musical tradition moves into the global arena, and becomes an exported commodity, and even a brand? Our conversation today tackles this rich topic and what it means to research Brazilian music at this point in the country's history, I think you'll learn a lot, as I did in speaking with Kaleb Goldschmitt.

[music] 01:09

Will Robin 01:37

So I want to start with an odd question, because it's personal, but it's about me.

Kaleb Goldschmitt 02:29

Sure. This is your podcast. [both laugh]

Will Robin 02:31

But I think with your expertise, hear me out, I think given your expertise, you'll have something useful to say about it, which is — for the past few years, and I don't exactly remember when it started, my wife

and I have regularly fallen asleep at night, listening to João Gilberto play bossa nova, like some of the classic albums. And I'm just wondering, given... what you make of that as a scholar of

Kaleb Goldschmitt 02:35

Wow!

Will Robin 02:36

... who examines the global circulation of Brazilian music and how its meaning changes in different mediations and audiences, and how that might resonate with your knowledge of bossa nova.

Kaleb Goldschmitt 03:09

Well, can I ask which era of João you're listening to?

Will Robin 03:12

It's the album *Amorosa*, I could not tell you the year because I just pulled it up on Spotify.

Kaleb Goldschmitt 03:18

So how that happened? Well, when I talked to somebody who works in bossa nova music for ambient context, this is for an essay that has never been published, because it's been stuck in an edited collection. I'm not going to complain about it too much. But I did do the research and talk to the... the said Yeah, well, they have like really smooth melodies and the accompaniment is nice and soothing. And so it works really well in ambient contexts. That is the ... and it's a slow tempo, you know, moderate tempo. And also he has a really lovely voice. His voice is so soft. He really took advantage of microphone technology, starting in the late 50s to get really close and not shout sing, not use that *Bel Canto* style that was really popular right before the bossa nova era. And so, my guess is it has something to do with the instrumentation? probably it's guitar, acoustic guitar. They say in Portuguese, the *violão*, the *violão* which has that really soft distillation of samba in it, but also the melodies aren't that angular, they're pretty... they tend to be pretty predictable, especially if they are ... even if they are on these very dissonant chords, very complex chords, he tends to really hang out in a narrow range and so it's — I say this even though he's passed away some years ago now, but he had a really soothing voice, one of his songs that I absolutely adore — love deeply to the point where I don't want to teach it because I don't want to have students say mean things about it — is called “*Este Seu Olhar*.” I love this song. And it's this super, super simple song. And the lyrics just gut me every time. And that's what does it for me, I speak Portuguese well enough to not have to look up the translations of most of the words. And it's this heartbreaking song of longing and love. And his sweet, really soft voice just penetrates me. One of my claims to fame is that I got to be quoted in the *New York Times* obit for when he passed away.

Will Robin 05:53

Okay, yeah, it actually may have started around when he passed away when I started listening to his music more. And then it was, Oh, this is nice... This is nice sleepytime music, but obviously, we're experiencing this music differently. Because I'm experiencing it through this mediated American market as ambient music, and you're experiencing it as more connected to perhaps its Brazilian roots, so to

speak. You talked about the sound, but what about how it ends up that this is a kind of music that an American listener might listen to differently than, let's say, a Brazilian listener in 1960? Or now?

Kaleb Goldschmitt 06:29

Yeah, 1962 and 1964 were the really, really big moments. And it penetrated so deeply into American pop culture, like so deeply. It's extraordinary how quick we, the history forgets that this happened. And part of the reason why I think we forget is because the Beatles happened right after, it's bossa nova then The Beatles. And I think how deeply this music just went everywhere. And it was so closely linked to cool jazz. And it was also linked to early 1960s dance fads, that it really just went all over the place. And that eventually became tied to sexy spy movies. Which is why I wrote that chapter. Because it still keeps on popping up in those contexts. If you watch film and television, it's just kind of relentless from where I'm sitting — wow, this music became sex music. And I think that moment when it got overplayed, became associated with easy listening, is when it became ambient music. I think that's how it got there. But the whole thing that motivated me to do the project was trying to show people this is Brazilian music. You know, this — I will say to people, oh, yeah, I wrote a book about Brazilian music and American and British media cultures. And they'll say, that's a very niche topic. And I'm like, yeah, the reason why I wrote it is because you know this music and you just don't know that that's what it is.

Will Robin 08:05

Right. Yeah.

Kaleb Goldschmitt 08:08

Because it's really quite... it's everywhere. And I will be in a movie, and suddenly, bossa nova will play. And I'm — Ah, there it is. Or watching television, my mom got to a point where she started to recognize bossa nova music and she would say — Hey, watch this TV show. [Will laughs] After the first... there's a Brazilian song in it... but I remember when I was writing the book — No, I was writing my dissertation, which was the foundation for two of the chapters in the book. I went and saw the movie Closer with my then partner. And there's this scene where Bebel Gilberto is basically performing in the movie, and I'm — how are people not talking about the fact that this is in this movie? And I kept on thinking I would do something else. And the topic just kept bringing me back. And I'm — ach! Because I am a bit tired of it, to be honest with you [Will laughs] I started the project literally 19 years ago. Yeah, I started during my first year of my PhD, and I started tinkering with Brazilian music as a topic in 2002. So it's been a very long time.

Will Robin 09:28

I want to get back to your personal trajectory. But let's talk a little bit about that moment in the early 60s. So how does bossa nova originate in Brazil and grow the momentum such that it becomes this global phenomenon.

Kaleb Goldschmitt 09:43

It originates among wealthy and middle class white folks hanging out in the wealthiest neighborhoods of Rio. It is mostly a reaction to the overwrought hyperdramatic style of samba song, or Samba-canção, that started with the golden age, 1930s. But it really got to be overbearing, some people thought, by the 1950s. And then, after Getúlio Vargas took his life, he was a strong man political figure. He was at one

point a dictator, and he was elected to President. There were many revolutions and new constitutions when he was in charge. And he's the guy who established the samba drum. So we're recording this on Ash Wednesday. And the significance of that is not lost on me, because yesterday was the last day of Carnival. And if you look on social media, you'll see all of this evidence of what Samba has meant to the national imaginary ever since the 1930s. And so you have this "Samba is Brazilian culture" thing that starts to happen. It becomes part of how international soft power works for the country. And it's a really big part of tourism, and all these things — really, really important, it gets appropriated by the state. What was once a persecuted or marginalized musical community becomes the main show. And so that happens in the 1930s. And in the 1950s, after Vargas takes his life, Kubitschek is elected, and he's this... Juscelino Kubitschek. And he has this big plan to heal the country, to modernize the country, to make it cosmopolitan. And there's a very wry expression, I would say, it's been said as "always the country of the future," or "Brazil is the country of the future, and always will be," meaning that it's never quite getting there, it's always in this forever subjugated position with tremendous potential. And you see this in a number of South American countries, especially Argentina and Brazil, both think that they should be as big as, say, France. And both of them have difficulty getting to that status. But with Brazil, you think about the landmass of it. And you think about the extraordinary resources and how much has been invested in it from foreign investors. And it never gets to this point of being a liberal democracy that is stable. Everybody's very happy that the democracy is still functional at the moment, but it's also got a lot of corruption. A lot of weird stuff goes on there. But when Kubitschek was elected, he promised to do 50 years of progress in five years. And when that was happening, it was really exciting because the government was spending ridiculous amounts of money. They had an auto plant in the country, they were getting a lot of investment and just ridiculous spending, he moved to the capital from Rio de Janeiro to the interior of the country, to Brasilia. But there was just ridiculous amounts of optimism for the middle classes. And there's been a lot of discussion of, well, Bossa Nova is a product of that moment. Like this — Let's sing love songs. Let's talk about technology. Let's sing about... let's use jazz. Let's use jazz harmonies and harmonies that come from French modernism and move away from this very limited musical vocabulary that Samba has, towards this very "sophisticated cosmopolitan" orientation. And you can see that with the ways that some of the musicians called what their names were, Antônio Carlos Jobim, the really famous composer of this era. His nickname is Tom. There's another really important singer, his name is Dick Farney. They're adopting names that come from jazz culture from the United States. And they love Frank Sinatra and Chet Baker, they really really adore these men who sing with soft vocals. And so they're listening to jazz there — and Nat King Cole, they like him too. But they are really focused on the vocal varieties of cool jazz and post-World-War-II pop jazz vocals. But as they bring Samba and this aesthetic together, it's an experiment. They don't know that it's going to work. A lot of people talk about it from the United States and from Western Europe. They talk about Black Orpheus as being the beginning of bossa nova. But Brazilians are -- no, no, no, no. That is not right. Bossa nova starts with Chega De Saudade, in the US it's called No More Blues. But as that film adaptation of a stage play was being put together, these musicians were experimenting with the techniques that would become bossa nova. The one thing that's missing is João Gilberto's style of singing. So when you listen to that soundtrack, its very quasi-operatic style of singing, if you listen to it, you're like, Whoa, what is this? The guitars sound familiar, and the harmonies sound familiar, the lyrics sound familiar, but you're missing that one piece. But it's coming from this international orientation, middle class, wealthy. people hanging out in Nara Leão's apartment looking at the coast. But then it catches on when João Gilberto records

Chega De Saudade with ... the recording producer was the same guy who was in Carmen Miranda's band that toured the US, and he was involved with adapting samba to Disney shorts. And so he had a really worldly view on what to do with his music. But that is where it came from. This song went on the radio, and it was this huge fad. And all of these musicians joined, followed João Gilberto, Antônio Carlos Jobim, Vinicius de Moraes -- those were the really big, important originators. And there was this huge group of people who followed along. And bossa nova, as it developed, really changed in sound. Some of it -- there was a hard bossa nova style, which is where Sérgio Mendes came from, it's where Eumir Deodato came from. And it's this much more brass heavy sound. And a lot of folks don't know that that's bossa nova. If you look at what people were calling it, it's this very big corpus of music. And most of the earliest recordings are really highly orchestrated. You listen to that, you hear french horn and flute and sometimes a string section, and the way that it gets reimagined in the United States, if you think about the Stan Getz and João Gilberto album, there's none of that. It's as pared down as possible. And if you look at when Charlie Byrd and Stan Getz did their album, that adaptation is very weird. As somebody who listens to too much bossa nova, listening to what happened in the first wave of bossa nova recordings in the US, it just is really, really weird compared to what was happening in Brazil. And it's almost like they fetishized the rhythm and João Gilberto's guitar, and the melodies and harmonies, and they forgot about everything else. Or if you think about this, the way that jazz musicians think about texts, -- they like the tune. And they did it their way. But because they liked the tune and did it their way, there's all of this stuff that's just missing or misunderstood. But it didn't take me very long of spending time in Brazil to figure out just how different the recordings there were versus what happens here.

Will Robin 18:30

So you mentioned this landing right before the Beatles. And it seems in some way, there's an analog to be made of Beatlemania -- you have this group not from the US absorbing musical styles from the US and then becoming famous locally, and then bringing that back into the US. So what is that moment when this music touches down in the US, what is its relationship to cool jazz, how does it become this cultural phenomenon here?

Kaleb Goldschmitt 18:58

The Kennedys. I think Jackie Kennedy in particular, and her way of being sophisticated and what that looked like, what that sounded like. The timing of when it falls, when Boston Nova fades is right after Kennedy gets assassinated. The timing of all of this is just really overwhelming, once you start looking at the larger context. And with US jazz, we're in the moment when free jazz is starting. When I was looking at the reception of this stuff, I'm flipping through pages, I did my research mostly, whenever I could, flipping through pages of old magazines, I would sit in the library for days, weeks... the first stage of research was looking... I wrote the first chunk of the book, that ends up staying in the book, for a seminar that I took with Tim Taylor and I remember spending three weeks in the library, just paging through old Downbeats because I was convinced something was missing. And I knew I wanted to do Brazilian music as a topic for my dissertation. I didn't know what I was going to do. And I remember paging through and on one page there would be -- one cover would be about John Cage. And you're like -- What is a jazz magazine doing with John Cage, what's going on there? And then there will be letters complaining about bossa nova inside and then you turn the page and there will be Ornette Coleman. And so I remember really clearly going, Oh, my God, it was all happening at the exact same

moment. And it's not that different from when people talk about like the year 1959 in jazz, just in terms of how thick that moment was. There's like even documentaries about this... you had Take Five, and Mingus's Ah Um, and all of this stuff happening at the exact same moment..

Will Robin 20:54

We often view it instead as like -- here was bebop, and then cool jazz, and then modal jazz, and then free jazz. But in fact, all of these things were often happening at the exact same time.

Kaleb Goldschmitt 21:03

At the exact same -- Kind of Blue at the exact same moment, Mingus the exact same moment as Shape of Jazz to Come. They're all happening around the same moment, while John Cage is doing his thing. And the jazz press and jazz musicians were paying attention to all of it at the same time. That's one thing. Second thing: I have talked to jazz musicians and I have talked to old fans of this music. And the way they describe it is, this gave you a way to appreciate music that wasn't from white people in the United States without having to confront the racial tensions that were all over Jazz at the time. So it gave people this escape hatch. And I am not going to excuse that -- some of the men I talked to just lusted after Astrud Gilberto or they wanted to have make-out music in their college dorms or whatever. But the way that they talk about -- oh, yeah, this gave us something to do that was different, that nobody was gonna say we were bad about civil rights, or we were bad about race and jazz. This is the same period when Amiri Baraka is calling out jazz critics. When Abbey Lincoln -- there's this jazz and race fixation that starts to show up in the press. And Ingrid Monson has published about this, in her book Freedom Sounds of just how intense the debate was. And I had seen much of the same stuff when I was looking at it, and I was gonna publish about it. And then I read Ingrid's book, and I was -- Well, I don't have to do that. Thanks, Ingrid. But it's all there, the jazz critics were suddenly realizing that they were complicit. People like John Hammond were being called out -- Well, he did some good stuff, but also look at this problem here. And all of these critics, like Gene Lees, Nat Hentoff, were being taken to task for having terrible racial politics. And they're responding to bossa nova. They are writing about it. They're trying to champion Antônio Carlos Jobim, they're complaining about the function of money, and how quickly all of these jazz musicians jumped on the bandwagon. And this is the same moment when Amiri Baraka is screaming about how quickly jazz has left its avant-garde roots behind and gone towards this much more popular version of jazz. It's happening at the same moment, and it's a problem but also people really like it. You know, people really like it because it's giving people a way to get out of this tension that has taken over, was starting to become noticeable, in the ways that jazz musicians were becoming more outspoken, as they should have been.

Will Robin 24:08

And so this is also ... what people are liking is Stan Getz and Gilberto recording together -- that's the moment when this really hits in the US.

Kaleb Goldschmitt 24:16

And they're liking Quincy Jones producing this and turning out this soulful bossa nova and they're liking Zoots, they're liking Herbie Mann, they're liking -- gosh, they're liking a lot of this stuff. They're liking Cannonball Adderley doing this, they like -- it's really quite varied. And by far the most financially successful, the person who capitalized the most off of this, without any debate, is Stan Getz. He really

rode that train as far as it would take him. At a certain point, he confessed that he was tired of playing it. But did he ever ... he kept on putting out these albums.

Will Robin 25:08

So what did Brazilian listeners and musicians make of the contextual transformation of this music as it becomes this phenomenon outside of Brazil?

Kaleb Goldschmitt 25:22

I can't speak for everybody, obviously, I can speak to what I have heard people say to me in the context... I once watched a documentary about this in my Portuguese class when I was attending PUC-Rio, which is the Catholic University in Rio de Janeiro. And I remember the way they talked about it was -- isn't this funny? Isn't this funny that the Americans are dancing to this music? That doesn't make any sense. But bossa nova was a massive fad in Brazil before it was a massive fad in the United States and the UK. So they have bossa nova TV sets and bossa nova rugs and all these things, and in the US, bossa nova haircuts, bossa nova cashmere sweaters. It was similar on that level -- ah, fad, we understand the fad thing happened to both places, but what it looked like and what people did were different. One of them is hyper intellectual, sophisticated, we are arriving on the world stage, yay. The other one is, look at this weird thing.

Will Robin 26:29

This moment is representative of a number of histories that you tell in the book beginning around this period, and going forward, of what it means for Brazil to promote itself globally through its music.

Kaleb Goldschmitt 26:44

Yeah. A national brand.

Will Robin 26:46

Can you talk about that idea of music as a national brand, and what that means in Brazil in particular, in a broader way?

Kaleb Goldschmitt 26:56

Sure. In Latin America, in particular, music has been really important to promoting countries internationally. So Mambo in Cuba, really important. Tango in Argentina, really important to the national... the way that the country tries to assert some power or leverage with international investors. With Mambo, it was an attraction for people on the East Coast of the United States to come down and party in Cuba. For tango, it was really fixed in and becomes a high ballroom style in Paris before it comes back, and suddenly it becomes celebrated. It goes from being the music of brothels to the music of high-class trendy people. And so this is the context, you have this history of music in Latin America being defined by Europe or the United States. And Pablo Palomino, the invention of Latin American music, and you see this as being an important way that the most powerful countries engaged with what's going on in South America and with Mexico and the Caribbean. And so, Brazil figures out really fast — the country, the government figures out really fast — that Samba can be used for soft power, meaning that it can increase goodwill, increase willingness to invest. And when we talk about the nation brand, it starts to become a thing that is really important on the global stage during the lead up to World

War II, and afterwards. And so with samba, and then bossa nova, this is music that is really closely tied to a national identity, that through a process of curation and we could say refinement, or whitening, or all kinds of processes that go into Samba becoming what it is, and that go into it becoming a commodity that can be promoted abroad, that people can make money off of [chuckles], that can go into why somebody like Orson Welles would want to film a documentary in Brazil. The very idea that you have this association of — Brazil is that land that has that dance, that has that music, that has beautiful beaches, and all of those things get heightened with bossa nova. Ah, this is music that's singing about pretty people on the beach, singing about love on the beach. And so especially through France, and England, but a lot of European countries like Italy too, Spain, Portugal, Germany — They really really like what's coming out of Brazil, what's coming out of South America and they start to invest in, say, filming movies there or in selling products there, so the soft brand becomes tied to revenue and investment. And Bossa Nova has been tied to Brazil's national brand. Ever since *Black Orpheus* won the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film. It has had this power, even though *Black Orpheus* wasn't a Brazilian film, because it took place there. And there was this musical style very close to what ends up becoming bossa nova. There's this linkage. And it allows the country to say -- Aha, we are a racial democracy. We have such good relations between the races that we can have this music that is taking from European styles like French modernism and taking from jazz, look, that's how cool we are. We've got it down, and everybody loves this music you should too, come and give us money. And so it becomes really closely linked to the identity of Rio de Janeiro and Rio de Janeiro becomes basically the postcard, in a sense, for what Brazil is to the rest of the world.

Will Robin 31:08

So how does that relate to this — you mentioned whitening, and also how when Bossa Nova is received in the US that allows white jazz critics to not have to think about US issues of race. So how does this discussion of music as a national brand intersect with discourses of race in Brazil, or contradict, or...?

Kaleb Goldschmitt 31:33

I'm gonna try this slowly. [Will laughs] So okay, samba — music associated with Afro Brazilians. It comes from *condomblé*, mixing it up with music of the street. And it also mixes up with people who were classically trained. So Samba is music that is of Afro Brazilians. It is associated with the favelas. It's associated with migrants coming down to Rio de Janeiro from the northeast, specifically Salvador Bahia. So it's this music that is very, very Black.. It becomes a National Style through political intervention, through Getúlio Vargas. And all but a handful of musicians associated with bossa nova are white or light-skinned. There were some who were not. Bola Sete, I write about him in the book, but there were some others. Elizeth Cardoso, who was the singer of the first recording of *Chega de Saudade*. She was a mulata or a mixed-race woman. So there were some important figures in all of this who weren't white. But the most powerful figures were. João Gilberto, he was from the northeast, he had lighter skin, but he definitely was mixed-race.. But you have Antônio Carlos Jobim and Vinicius de Moraes being these like very white dudes who have most of the power in the genre. They're getting all the publishing rights — well, most of the publishing rights. And they are these standard white Brazilian dudes. And there are a lot of them in the country who were extremely talented, who were extremely open minded towards race, but they have a European sensibility on terms of what the lyrics are supposed to do and what the harmonies are supposed to do. So it does become whitened in that way.

But I'm trying to complicate the — it's only white, and it's just really dominated by this white aesthetic. And when Vinícius de Moraes publishes or writes the liner notes, he calls himself the poet of the lyrics. He's asserting the power of what he's doing. And so, there are all of these indications that purely instrumental versions of bossa nova just don't do as well. They don't sell as well. It's only the vocal music that does well, that has this reputation. And most of the music scholars in Brazil continue to be in departments of letters. So the music is truly treated as really elevated literature, in this country, like in cultural studies departments or literature departments, we pretend that we do that. It's not like what happens in Brazil.

Will Robin 34:24

It's kind of like Bob Dylan studies in the US or something.

Kaleb Goldschmitt 34:27

Right, right So take Bob Dylan studies and expand it out to all of the important lyricists after World War II.

Will Robin 34:33

Hmm. So, returning to your trajectory. How did you end up spending 19 years working on Brazilian music? [Kaleb laughs] How did you get into this?

Kaleb Goldschmitt 34:44

How did I get into it?

Will Robin 34:45

How did you get in deeper and deeper?

Kaleb Goldschmitt 34:47

Yeah. So like most kids trying and failing to play jazz in high school, I played a lot of bad bossa nova. And this was around the period right after Antônio Carlos Jobim died, and so there was a lot of access to recordings of bossa nova in record stores at that time. I'm a bit older than you I don't know how much but I know I am. But in high school, I would go to warehouse music and there would be these displays of CDs and I remember specifically the first time I bought something that had bossa nova on it was in the lead up to Father's Day of my junior year of high school. So we're talking 1996 I bought — [chuckles] that ages me, but I bought a Stan Getz compilation. And I remember the moment when I heard — there were two recordings that were from the Getz-Gilberto sessions, it was the longer non-radio version of Girl from Ipanema and Corcovado. And I remember just fixating on those and thinking the rest of it was terrible. And it's probably because I was hearing a lot of bossa nova elsewhere, I'm sure of it. But it was my first time encountering the song Girl from Ipanema. I went on this tour of Israel, because I was a Jewish kid growing up in Southern California that summer. And one of the kids on that tour was a Brazilian Jew. And he used to sing the lyrics of the Girl from Ipanema in Portuguese to me, because he knew it made him cool. So that is this really important early moment for me. I remember trying to play the Jamey Aebersold books on Jobim's music. I was terrible. I could not get...

Will Robin 36:36

What was your instrument?

Kaleb Goldschmitt 36:38

Trumpet, trumpet and bass.

Will Robin 36:41

Everyone wants to hear that. Gilberto on the high school trumpet, yeah...

Kaleb Goldschmitt 36:48

Jeez Yeah, terrible. And then skip forward to the end of my undergraduate years. I took a seminar on Brazilian music. It was not a very successful class. But I became obsessed with the music in that class. The professor, the instructor of the course gave us tapes of the music because he couldn't figure out how to use the streaming platform that we had — this was 2001. The streaming was terrible. They used real media or something. I remember it was just awful. So he just was like, give me a tape, I'll make you a mix of all the music. And I remember I used to drive evening vans around UCLA, from the various parts of campus to the parking lots. And I would just listen to this music. And not all of it was bossa nova, an awful lot of it was like MPB music, and I just loved it. And I remember after that course was over, I graduated, I finished my undergrad. And I somehow managed to get a good grade in the class, even though I thought I was terrible at it. And I remember thinking -- Hmm, if I love this music, in spite of what I think was unsuccessful teaching, this is something to pay attention to. Because when we're undergraduates, or when we're teaching undergraduates, and we're charismatic professors, or we're having a good day, and somebody falls in love with the music, that's kind of a normal experience. If we're having a terrible day, or a terrible semester, or a terrible quarter, wherever system we're in, and the student falls in love with music that's a bit different. And that's what happened to me. It wasn't a very good class for me. I remember struggling the whole time. Having seriously bad feelings about the instructor, but also loving the music. So I couldn't hate the instructor. I just thought, wow, this is a bad class. But I loved the music. And I ran into him a few years after that class, and I was like -- That class changed my life. He was like -- It was such a bad class. I'm so sorry you were in it. So he knew it didn't work out. But I still was like -- Whoa, I want to learn Portuguese. Went to grad school, UC San Diego. I went there to work with George Lewis, before he left. And I remember the first term, I did a project on Carmen Miranda, but I didn't speak a word of Portuguese. And everybody was like, well, you can learn Portuguese later. And I was like, okay. But I was fixated on like, tell me how I can do this. And I realized I had to write a master's thesis. So I did something else for a while because there was no way I was gonna learn Portuguese in time to do a thesis. We only have two years to do a masters. There's no way. I went to UCLA, saw the Assad brothers play at Royce Hall, my second term of UCLA for my PhD, and I was like, dammit, I need to learn this music. I applied for a FLAS grant. I got it. I learned Portuguese.

Will Robin 39:43

So we haven't really talked about ... you talked about the presidential administrations leading up to bossa nova. But your book came out in 2019, which is the same year that Bolsonaro was elected, we're speaking a few months after he was fortunately ousted by Lula, and I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about how the last few years have affected Brazilian music but also how they've affected your

own understanding of the work that you're doing and also your own abilities to do scholarly work in and around Brazil.

Kaleb Goldschmitt 40:15

So I'll start with the depressing stuff first, which was I don't think I can go back to Brazil for a while. The Bolsonaristas... they're not gone, Lula won, but he didn't win by that much. And so, me being trans means that I don't feel safe. I'm just like — No, I can't go. I have friends who are much more comfortable dealing with it, like gay friends. But people who are intellectuals, people who are Black, or who speak about Black rights or racial rights in Brazil, people who believe that gender is not necessarily what you are assigned with at birth, are not safe. Academics have been — during his administration it was dangerous for them to hold their jobs. I knew people who were trying to leave. And so as a scholar who fell in love with Brazilian culture, like it was intense, I dedicated many decades, I would say, more than a decade, almost two, to working with the music in that country. The day that I woke up and found out he was going to be president, it felt like really intense heartbreak. I felt it physically. I remember it was in my body. And I was like, God, and like, every Brazilianist I knew — we were all like, what are we going to do? So I decided that it wasn't safe for me to go back. And so I had to come up with other ways to occupy myself, but there was still plenty of hope coming from certain segments of the population. So somebody who I am really proud has gotten as much attention as she has is an artist named Liniker. She won the Grammy for Best MPB album, I believe. And she's a trans woman. And right when I was finishing my book, she had a Tiny Desk concert on NPR, she's a big deal. And she and a bunch of other trans artists were suddenly doing really well, I work for a journal, I'm a co-editor for a journal called the Journal of Popular Music Studies. And we have an article coming out in the summer, that's all about another trans artist, this one's Pepita. And we're seeing this flourishing of very bold trans artists being very popular, gender nonconforming artists, there's one named Pablo Vittar who I write about my book, but they're household names, everybody knows who they are. They're doing really well. And early into Bolsonaro's administration, some of the top hip hop artists were releasing songs that were very clearly coded as gay, even though they are themselves not — they were trying to assert some sort of allyship. And that gives me a lot of hope. Because when you have a country like Brazil, that is on the surface very liberal around sexuality, but in practice really isn't. Seeing that kind of outpouring of support, public support is really helpful. So I am really happy about that bit. I wish that I was more comfortable taking the risk to go there. I just don't want to deal with — dealing with my passport, what's going to happen when I go through the passport line? Because the people who are running security, or at the border checkpoint, how many of them were supporting Bolsonaro. When you look at what happened with the protests that happened in Brazil, in early January, that looked a lot like what happened here in this country, it's scary to say the least, because a lot of the police just let it happen. Because the Bolsonaro protesters raided government buildings having to do with all three branches of government. And they trashed the place. What gives me hope is that there was a crackdown on everybody right away. So people got arrested right away. Whereas in this country, we don't really have much of ... in comparison, we don't see that same kind of swiftness of stopping this, but ... I am depressed about it. I'm feeling more hope. But for the last four years, I was like -- Well, I guess I have to do other things, because I can't be going. And I found other things to do. And I found a new project to work on that I'm excited to work on. But I'm not done with Brazil, I keep on trying to be but I cannot. I keep on trying. It's impossible. But with music, it is one of the most diverse musical countries you can imagine. There's this really great queer sertanejo singer named Gabeu. And he's

really hilarious and fun, and he has a good Instagram account and a good TikTok. And he tells funny stories and he's doing really well, he's on all of these big playlists that are for Brazilian versions of our streaming services. He's a big deal, with queernejo, there was a whole feminist movement of the most conservative genre, that sertanejo style, that's called feminejo, that is giving me so much hope. Wow, look at this, we don't have the language in the United States to describe quite what this is like. It would be like -- you know how in the US we have alt country? Imagine if the alt country people actually took over country radio? Imagine how powerful that would be. That kind of thing is happening with sertanejo — really, really hopeful. And if I were still working on Brazilian music full time, that would be the thing I'd want to work on because there's just so much energy and enthusiasm around it. Gabeu was nominated for a Latin Grammy for Best sertanejo album, he didn't win, but he got to go. And he was very happy to be there. And he's the small guy from the interior who puts out these hilarious songs about sugar daddies and stuff. And it's just really, really amazing. And it's not the kind of stuff that makes international news around pop music changes, right. But it also gives me so much hope because it's like, Look at this. This is the most conservative part of the country. And that's the music that has the most traction right now. And increasingly young people in Brazil, even in the most wealthy parts, so people from Sao Paulo and Rio, like this music, they see it as being less constrained than the music that is based off of samba. This is the music that speaks to them more.

Will Robin 47:29

Well, thank you so much for speaking with me. I really appreciate it.

Kaleb Goldschmitt 47:32

Yeah, thank you.

[music] 47:33

Will Robin 47:41

Many thanks to Kaleb Goldschmitt for that deep conversation. You can read more about their work on our website, soundexpertise.org. Our inbox is again open. If you have questions or thoughts about the show or anything else you want to say, email us at soundexpertise00@gmail.com, or tag me on twitter or Instagram @seatedovation. I'm grateful to D. Edward Davis for his production work, you can check out his music on SoundCloud at [warm silence](https://www.soundcloud.com/warm-silence), and many thanks to Andrew Dell'Antonio for transcribing our episodes to make them more accessible. This episode of Sound Expertise was recorded at the National Foreign Language Center with support from University of Maryland School of Music. Next week on Sound Expertise, the deeply fascinating musical life of Joshua Rifkin.

[Unidentified Speaker] 48:26

... through a long series of accidents, which I needn't bore you with, that led to the formation of the Even Dozen Jug Band. This is in the summer of 1963 — again, by the way, the same summer in which I was, on another night, playing the first performance of Satie's Vexations...

49:03

[Music]