

June 23, 2014

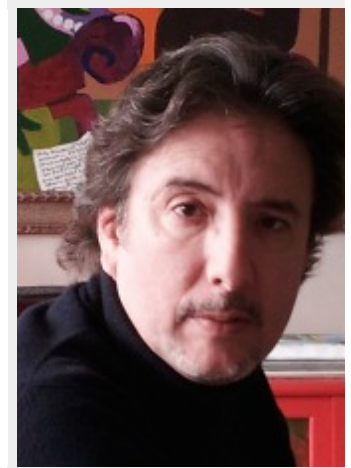
Studio Rio: 'Brazil Connection'



Back in the early late 1990s, before the proliferation of high-speed modems and iTunes, I spent most Saturday mornings at Tower Records near New York's Lincoln Center. The large corner store had lots of listening stations in different sections, so you could use headphones to audit new music before buying. Toward the back of the first floor, just before the international section, there was an aisle devoted to house, techno and other dance forms. [Photo above, from left, Frank and Christian Berman]

About

Marc Myers writes frequently on music and the arts for the *Wall Street Journal*. He is author of "Why Jazz Happened" (University of California Press). In 2012, JazzWax was named the Jazz Journalists Association's "Blog of the Year."



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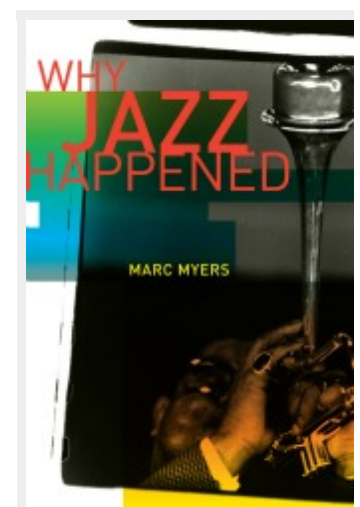
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In 2001, Verve opened its vaults to DJs and producers like



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In 2001, Verve opened its vaults to DJs and producers like Rae & Christian and Mark De Clive-Lowe, who remixed classic jazz tracks with big synth beats, samples and loops. Songs like Shirley Horn's *Return to Paradise*, Billie Holiday's *Strange Fruit* and Ella Fitzgerald's *Wait Till You See Him* were dipped into an electronica bath, emerging virtually unrecognizable. In truth, the results were an abomination, with the vocals chopped into hiccups and stutters timed to match the beats. It was like watching someone apply graffiti to fine art. None of the songs on *Verve Remixed Vol. 1* or the installments that followed were worthy nor did they hold up. They had zero respect for the originals, turning the vocals into zombie tracks. The singers sound drugged, as if in a daze.

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So when Studio Rio's *The Brazil Connection* (Sony) crossed my desk a few weeks ago, I was suspect. Oh no, I thought, here goes another tasteless mauling of great music. Scanning the track list, I was surprised to see jazz vocals and hit soul recordings like Sly and the Family Stone's *Family Affair*, Marvin Gaye's *Sexual Healing* and Bill Withers's *Lovely Day* along with Mel Torme's *I've Got You Under My Skin*, Nina Simone's *I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to be Free* and Billie Holiday's *You've Changed* from her *Lady in Satin* album.

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JazzWax Interviewed

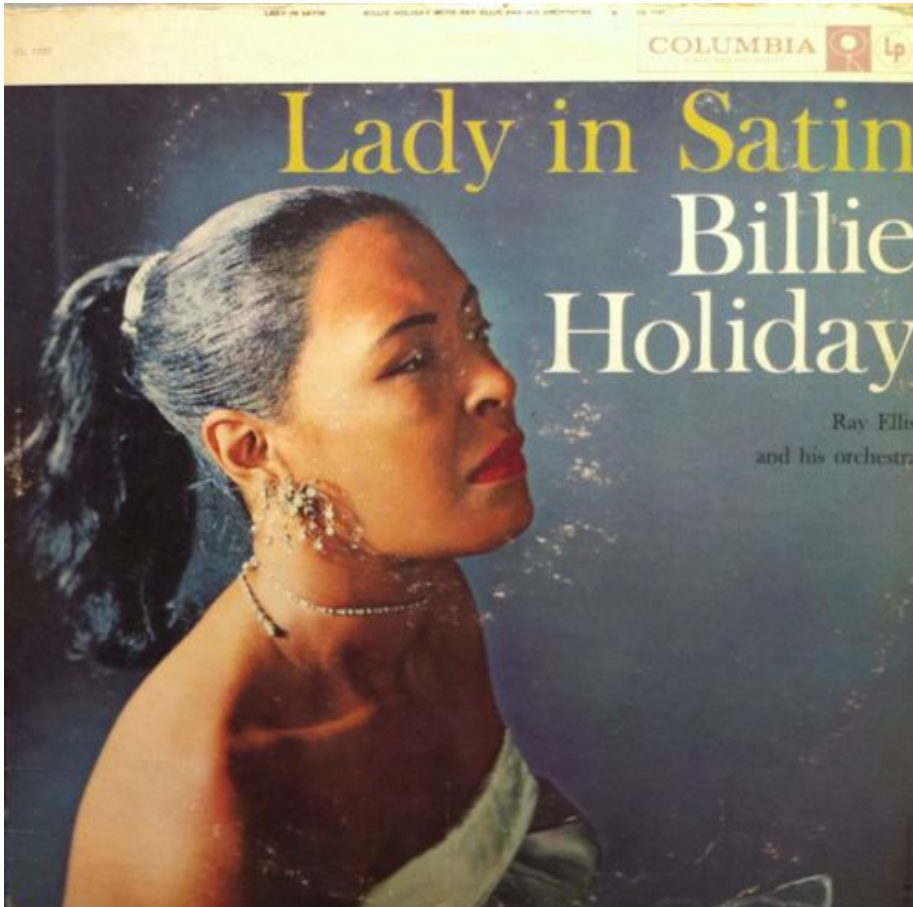


Wow, I thought, not only are they going to wreck jazz classics but soul standards as well. I popped on the CD and clicked on *Family Affair*. Much to my amazement, the music sounded great. So great, in fact, I assumed that Sly and his sister Rose's vocals were done by impersonators. What made the track so scary is that the vocals were left unmarred while the original drum box and wah-wah instrumental was replaced by a spirited bossa nova. And not just any bossa. The music sounded sophisticated and smart.



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What Studio Rio did is to lift only the vocals with Sony's blessing (all of the music is from Sony's catalog) and then have Brazilian studio musicians in Rio write arrangements and play them along with the original vocals. The results are

breathhtaking, tasteful and seamless. I next jumped to Torme's *I've Got You Under My Skin*. Gorgeous. Then came Holiday's *You've Changed*. My goodness, a bossa nova was a splendid substitute for Ray Ellis's original arrangement from 1958.



When I interviewed Frank Berman, who produced the album with his brother Christian, for [*The Wall Street Journal*](#), he told me that was the point—to make listeners worldwide aware that all music is connected. "Bossa nova is an art form in Rio and, when applied correctly, works with anything, especially jazz and soul," he said.

This versions on this album aren't replacements for the originals but fascinating and fun alternatives. I don't say this often, but I guarantee you're going to love it.

JazzWax tracks: You'll find Studio Rio's *The Brazil Connection* [here](#).

JazzWax clip: [Here's](#) Billie Holiday singing *You've Changed*, with a new arrangement by Torcuato Mariano, with Mariano on guitar, Paulo Calasans on bass, Paulo Braga on drums, Pretinho Da Serrinha on percussion, Jessé Sadoc on trumpet and flugelhorn, and Marcelo Martins on flute...



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