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By MARC MYERS

Updated June 20, 2014 1:08 a.m. ET



Thomas Kühlenbeck

The vocals on "Family Affair" sound a lot like Sly Stone and his sister Rose. But instead of the 1971 hit's slinky groove, the original music is gone, replaced by a sultry bossa nova with horns. Is that Sly and Rose singing—or impersonators?

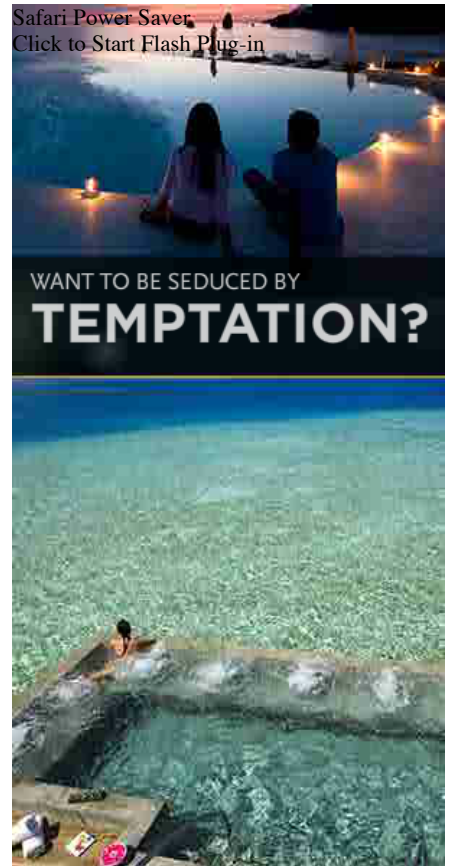
"It's Sly and Rose," said Frank Berman, 48, who produced "The Brazil Connection" ([Sony](#) 6758.TO -0.06%) with his brother Christian, 45.

As World Cup host Brazil basks in the global spotlight, the new album infuses 12 familiar American songs with the country's traditional rhythms. "The Brazil Connection," due out June 23, takes the vocals from soul and jazz hits and surrounds them in sambas. Songs chosen by the German-born Berman brothers include Bill Withers's "Lovely Day," Johnny Nash's "I Can See Clearly Now." Aretha Franklin's "Walk on By" and Marvin Gaye's "Sexual Healing"

"Once we isolated the vocal tracks, we had top Rio studio arrangers and musicians record fresh backgrounds," Mr. Berman said. "We wanted to give familiar American songs an updated feel and show that all music is connected."

Adding a seductive bossa beat to classic recordings is risky. If arrangements lack sophistication, the catchy Brazilian rhythm can make star performers sound like wedding singers. And monkeying with classic songs has a history of disappointing results. In the early 2000s, DJs who were invited to remix various labels' soul, jazz and bossa catalogs doused the recordings in synthesized house beats.

Sensitive to the missteps of past attempts, the Berman brothers preserved the original



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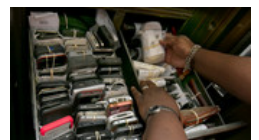
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recorded vocals. "Two years ago, Christian and I were sitting on a balcony in Berlin and heard Billie Holiday's 'You've Changed' from 1958 coming from a distance," Mr. Berman said. "Christian turned to me and remarked how laid-back her voice sounded on the album 'Lady in Satin,' as if you could put a slow bossa beat behind it. So we tried it."

First, the Bermans pulled Holiday's vocal loose from the original recording. "We teamed with Berlin's Science of Sounds, a digital lab, and created new algorithms to isolate her voice," Mr. Berman said. "We also did this with a few other songs from the '60s. Then we sat around in a basement playing bossa guitar and clapping Brazilian rhythms behind them. It worked."

1. Lovely Day - Studio ...
Bill Withers, Studio Rio

▶ **1. Lovely Day – Studio Rio V...** 3:58
Bill Withers, Studio Rio

▶ **2. Walk on By – Studio Rio V...** 3:20
Aretha Franklin, Studio Rio

▶ **3. Sexual Healing – Studio RI...** 4:09
Marvin Gaye, Studio Rio

▶ **4. You've Changed – Studio ...** 3:47
Billie Holiday, Studio Rio

▶ **5. Family Affair – Studio Rio...** 3:51
Sly & The Family Stone, Studio...

▶ **6. It's Your Thing – Studio R...** 3:06
The Isley Brothers, Studio Rio

▶ **7. I've Got You Under My Ski...** 3:11
Mel Torme, Studio Rio

The Bermans approached Sony's Legacy division to ask if they could use the label's catalog. With Sony's blessing, the Bermans flew down to Rio and rented an apartment near Ipanema Beach. "We had a wish list of songs but needed Brazilian musicians for the real feel," Mr. Berman said. "We didn't know anyone there, but we're world inhabitants with laptops, so little by little we met accomplished musicians who turned us on to others."

After a week in Rio, they met with Marcos Valle, a bossa nova legend. "He loved the concept but warned that if we didn't do it right, fans of the music would kill us," Mr. Berman said, laughing. "Marcos agreed to be part of the project and introduced us to other Brazilian

studio musicians and arrangers." The list included Roberto Menescal, Torcuato Mariano and Mario Adnet.

The Bermans had just one rule: The vocals had to remain untouched—no speeding them up, overdubbing or digital manipulation. "The Brazilian artists treated the vocal like a live artist in the studio," said Mr. Berman. "They put on headphones and played along."

While the Bermans were recording in Rio, Sony discovered multitrack recordings for most of the soul choices, enabling the brothers to use the vocal tracks. But for songs by Holiday, Sarah Vaughan, Carmen McRae and the Isley Brothers, the Bermans had to rely on Science of Sounds. On all the tracks, though, Mr. Berman says, "the vocals were so well-recorded that we didn't have to mask any of them with reverb or other effects." "We just made sure the Rio instrumentals were recorded at the same pristine level."

Mr. Adnet, who arranged the bossa-flavored rendition of "Family Affair," followed his instincts. "I wanted to add some Brazilian sauce to match the song's earthiness," he said from Rio. "Actually, I wasn't really familiar with the original song or how popular it was. I think that was true for many of the arrangers and musicians. If we had known, we might not have felt as free to create a completely new approach."

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