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JAZZ REVIEW

Bossa nova celebration is golden

By Howard Reich

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July 26, 2008

Fifty years ago, Brazil invented a music that seduced audiences around the world.

And on Thursday night, an estimated 10,000 listeners swarmed into Millennium Park to celebrate the golden anniversary of the bossa nova.

In what had to be one of the most ambitious such events in the United States, the Brazilian born, Chicago-based singer-guitarist Paulinho Garcia convened more than a dozen musicians to trace the evolution of the form.

But this was no dry history lesson. Playing classic and obscure bossa nova masterworks with his newly formed Orquestra Brazzilli, Garcia let the music do most of the talking.

The event kicked off Millennium Park's annual "Made in Chicago: World Class Jazz" series, which will run weekly through August.

Staffing his Orquestra Brazzilli with Brazilian virtuosos and their Chicago counterparts, Garcia probed beyond the most obvious bossa works, even as he included a couple of them.

If Garcia's band's account of "Girl From Ipanema" unfolded at a faster clip than Astrud Gilberto's famous recording, the rest of the program was marked by extraordinarily slow and sensuous performances.

Garcia and friends began at the beginning, with "Chega de Saudade" ("No More Blues"), generally considered the first bossa nova recording (though the roots of bossa pre-date this 1958 release). Here was the only tentative portion of the program, Garcia and others playing so softly and gingerly that the tune very nearly was lost in the cavernous Pritzker Pavilion.

But Garcia and Orquestra Brazzilli recovered quickly in another bossa landmark, "Manha de Carnaval," Luiz Bonfá's plaintive theme for the film "Black Orpheus." The lustrous

opening passages for string quartet, the coolly insinuating lines of tenor saxophonist Greg Fishman and the haunting accompaniment of accordionist Julien Labro deserved to be preserved on disc.

So did virtually every note played by 77-year-old guest pianist Joao Donato, a bossa nova pioneer who ventured here from Rio de Janeiro for this concert. The buoyant rhythms he played in his "A Ra," the ingenious way he reharmonized "Take Five" and the sleek jazz pianism he brought to "Chicago," of all things, attested to his stature as a composer and improviser who transcends bossa nova.

"Made in Chicago: World Class Jazz" continues with the Chicago Afro-Latin Jazz Ensemble at 6:30 p.m. Thursday at Millennium Park; free; 312-742-1168.

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