

Castaways:
An Analysis of The Backyardigans' Bossa Nova Authenticity

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64:280 Chromatic Harmony

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The song *Castaways*, from the eleventh episode of *The Backyardigans*, effectively and accurately portrays the genre of bossa nova to a young audience without sacrificing any of the important musical aspects that make bossa nova bossa nova.

Every episode of *The Backyardigans* follows a different genre of music, bossa nova being the genre of *Castaways*. This song follows an ABA' ternary form and as Burstein and Straus (2020b) note in their textbook, the B section of ternary form often is in a new key, as is true for this song. The song starts with the A section, and following common bossa nova style, the B section sequences through different keys and returns to the A' section to conclude. Though I would consider the B section to modulate in a sequence, it is not a kind of consistent modulation that we have previously seen in class or the textbook (Burstein 2020) and will require further research on my part. This sequence modulates first down a whole step from C to Bb, then a half step from Bb to A, landing in A minor instead of A major or even Ab major.

Bossa nova is often referred to as the music of the bourgeois (Appel 2008) and as such is a rather accessible style of music with a softer tone. The accompaniment to this piece in the guitar, strings, and percussion helps to bring that more authentic feel while the singing children's voices are superimposed on top. While it sounds like the children are trying to fit the style, there is still a forced, almost shout like timbre of children's singing. This does not entirely ruin the song's credibility as bossa nova as there are a number of bossa nova songs that involve children singing, such as Luiz Bonfá's *Samba de Orfeu* in the 1959 movie *Orfeu Negro*.

Though there has been lots of debate about what influences jazz and blues had over the development of bossa nova, it originates its rhythms from the samba, an earlier style of music and playing that featured percussion lines quite heavily. The bossa nova took the syncopated rhythms of the samba and its percussion and applied them to its harmonic rhythms and melodies

(McCann 2007). Whether or not blues and jazz were direct influences, there are certainly a lot of similarities between the styles in terms of harmony and melodic proclivities, as well as influences on jazz from bossa nova. Even today there are a fair number of jazz standards that are bossa nova's or at least have heavy influence from them. See Blue Bossa by Kenny Dorham (1963) for example.

The genre or style of bossa nova is more than purely rhythm or instrumentation. Bossa nova is a form of expression; it unites and brings people together across hardships to bond over music (Appel 2008). This is portrayed in the actions of the characters as they come together to sing about their 'experience' of getting trapped on a desert island and bond. Though some bossa nova uses things like tritone substitutions and the blues scale (McCann 2007), *Castaways* sticks to the more minimalist core of the bossa nova style.

Bibliography

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