

Luiz Bonfá, Ron Carter, Sadao Watanabe, Larry Coryell, Eumir Deodato, and Marcos Valle.

So you've got to be thinking, it's about time that Ithamara Koorax - "Ithamara Koorax, Ithamara Koorax, Ithamara Koorax" - had an American release. Folks, it's way past about time. But, like I said, when it comes to Brazilian music, we Americans tend to get our information a little late (bossa nova boomed here a good five years after it boomed back home).

So, introducing the first American album by a beautiful singer: *Serenade in Blue*. It's about time.

This album is a delicious grab bag of songs, most of them familiar, some of them in English, all of them delivered with impeccable taste. If you want to judge somebody by the company they keep, *Serenade in Blue* displays Ithamara's continued ability to draw top-flight guests. The Cuban jazz piano virtuoso Gonzalo Rubalcaba, the first-generation bossa nova legend Marcos Valle, the hitmaking arranger-keyboardist Eumir Deodato, the legendary guitarist Jay Berliner (famous for his work with Charles Mingus, Frank Sinatra and Milt Jackson), the one-man percussion section Dom Um Romão, and Azymuth, one of the finest jazz groups to ever come out of Brazil, are all on hand.

The album kicks off with "Bonita", one of the

most haunting of all Jobim melodies, recorded so memorably by the master and Elis Regina on *Elis Especial*. Ithamara sings persuasively in English, with a jazz singer's sense of phrasing and dynamics, and the arrangement, by Nelson Angelo, is a slow, swaying jazz bossa nova that sets up a misty Gonzalo Rubalcaba solo. The flutes and saxophones are played by Carlos Malta, a veteran of Hermeto Pascoal's band.

"Serenade in Blue", again sung in lovely, gently accented English, is the Mack Gordon-Harry Warren standard from *Orchestra Wives*, the 1942 Swing Era film that starred Glenn Miller and his Orchestra. Ithamara is backed by the great fusion group, Azymuth, and José Roberto Bertrami's arrangement, taken at a languid tempo, surrounds her with warm electric keyboards, vibes, and synthesized strings and horns. Lovely.

Azymuth is joined by Rubalcaba and the tour de force percussion section of Dom Um Romão (ex-Weather Report) and Laudir de Oliveira (ex-Chicago) for one of Brazil's greatest standards, Jorge Ben's "Mas Que Nada", which threw some samba into the American pop charts in 1966 thanks to Sergio Mendes & Brasil '66. Ithamara is back in her native Portuguese, and the tone is set by Alex Malheiros's thumb-popping bass (this is an extravagant mix of samba and funk