

Bossa Blue

“The idea is to bring these different worlds together,” says singer-songwriter Brad Cole when asked to describe Bossa Blue, the exquisite musical collective that he fronts. “Not just bossa nova and blues, but rock, samba, jazz, R&B, old ska, old soul... Whenever we’re trying out one of my songs or seeing what we can do with a cover, I always ask myself, ‘Are we doing something interesting to the song itself? Is the song doing something meaningful for me and the band? Is it doing something cool for the audience?’ There has to be that shared connection there, that’s how we know it works.”

And work it does — beautifully. Bossa Blue’s uniquely alchemical approach taps straight into the esoteric essence of the music, peeling back the layers of whatever song’s being played to reveal its innermost heart while simultaneously exploring its outermost edges.

Bossa Blue, the band’s stunning debut EP, shimmers with a heady reworking of Coldplay’s “Trouble” and four original compositions that include the utterly intoxicating “Montana.” It’s a deep cocktail-cauldron swimming with swooning grooves that all lovers of sublime sounds will ecstatically immerse themselves in.

Launched in 2017 as a side project of Cole’s lengthy and acclaimed solo career, Bossa Blue’s lineup coalesced decisively in March 2022 around the quartet of Cole (lead vocals, guitar), Mark Dann (bass, harmonies), Jerry Plotkin (keyboards, harmonies), and Bobby Sabella (drums, percussion). “All of these guys have made their careers as accomplished sidemen and music producers,” says Cole. “I don’t think I’ve ever played with a group of more acute listeners in my life.”

Which is saying something, as Cole has certainly been around. The veteran performer started out in the famously fertile club scene of his native Chicago, playing in the bands Treatment, the Second Story, Psycholove, and Check with Lucy on bills with legendary locals like Junior Wells, Otis Rush, Uncle Tupelo, and Smashing Pumpkins. In 2009 he ditched his day job and hit the road as a touring solo artist and, as it has for so many songwriters, that road eventually took him to Nashville and Austin, where he sharpened his chops at song swaps and open mics. The ensuing 15 years have seen Cole opening for Chris Stapleton, Ingrid Michaelson, Hothouse Flowers, Shovels and Rope, Dave Davies, and others and headlining venues in the US, UK, and Ireland and playing in the revered trio Cole, Nakoa, and Treacher. After the release of his critically hailed, jazz-tinged 2017 album *Lay It Down*, though, he found himself being pulled in another direction.

“I’d been riding the Americana train for a while, and I wanted to try something else,” Cole recalls. “*Lay It Down* has a bossa/samba/soul/blues feel, which inspired me to put together a live

project to reinterpret some of my favorite cover tunes in a similar setting — like how the old jazz players would do with American Songbook standards.” Thus, Bossa Blue was born, taking flight with a changeable lineup and a James Taylor tribute set before adding more covers (Brandi Carlile, the Beatles, the Killers, the Police) and, increasingly, originals while settling on its core foursome. The collaborative has become a hot draw in its Hudson Valley home and in New York City, and the fluid lineup at its revelatory residencies frequently sees guest artists sitting in. “It’s a great way to meet people and other players, to build a little scene,” explains Cole.

“Brad Cole’s Bossa Blue brings a touch of Brazil to his shows and solid musicianship from his first-rate band,” raves WFUV’s John Platt.

“When things get jammy and there’s a lot of energy — that’s a big payoff for us musicians,” says Cole about the Bossa Blue live experience. “But mainly it’s an opportunity to bring people together when so much has had us divided. It’s about people just getting into the music, dancing and singing along. What could be better than that?”

Bossa Blue and special guests will perform during a residency at Colony in Woodstock, New York, on January 26, February 23, and March 23.