



MARCH 2010 ISSUE

Features

FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome! Bienvenidos to Latin Beat Magazine Online. This Volume 20, Number 2, March 2010 issue features the Dallas, Texas-based powerhouse band Havana NRG, currently enjoying the release of its latest CD production, Receta Perfecta (Perfect Recipe). You can also meet and view the work of Latin music and entertainment photographer Jose M. Hernández. Latin Beat Magazine Online continues in the same vein and focus as our print magazine while adding the multi-media magic of the Internet, allowing us the capability of streaming music, showcasing videos and updating events and information on a more routine basis.

And as always, you can count on lots of music and entertainment news, reviews, hit parades and music information for your enjoyment. - *Rudy Mangual*

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HAVANA NRG (New Rhythm Generation)

By Rudy Mangual

Hailing from the state of Texas, where everything is bigger than life, Havana NRG is a Latin octet with a big



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sound, a talented cast of players that deliver contagious Cuban and Afro-Caribbean rhythms. Since its debut in Dallas in the summer of 2002, Havana NRG has been able to captivate audiences throughout the Lone Star State via its colorful rhythms and high energy, revealing indeed a new era of Cuban music. In 2003, Havana NRG released its debut CD *Camino al Cielo*, receiving rave reviews nationwide and abroad. The good feedback opened doors and allowed the band to travel outside of Texas to New York City, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Las Vegas, and Miami. Currently, the band is enjoying the release of its sophomore production, *Receta Perfecta*.



"We have been able to prove that we are indeed a new breed of Latin band (the New Rhythm Generation) that is taking our Cuban roots to new levels of performance. And we owe our great success not only to a magnificent combination of fantastic musicians, but mainly to supportive audiences everywhere. With your continued support, we'll keep growing."

Meet the New Rhythm Generation:

Mariela Suárez is Havana NRG's commander-in-chief and musical director. A native of Havana, she started performing at the age of four, as part of the musical children's group "Meñique." Suárez graduated with a technical and professional degree as instrumentalist and violin professor. In 1992, she joined the prestigious orchestra of the Cabaret Tropicana in Havana. Then she went on to lead the band Cuestión Seria, which won the 1995 "Novel Orchestra Award" in Cuba. Suárez was a member of the Symphonic Orchestra of Nuevo León for three years, while functioning as violin professor at the Instituto Superior de Música in Monterey, México. She relocated to Dallas in 1999, working as a multi-instrumentalist and arranger throughout the local music scene. In 2002, she became a founding member of Havana NRG.

Iván Martínez Havana NRG's timbalero (and Mariela's husband) – is a native of Pinar del Rio, Cuba. He earned a Bachelor's Degree in Music Education from Havana University in 1992, and started his professional career as a trombonist and musical director for the group Son Imagen. In 1993, Iván joined Cuestión Seria as a trombonist and shared the responsibilities of musical director with Mariela Suárez. While living in México, he became a member of the group Caribe Show. In 1999, he joined Mariela in Dallas, working as percussionist and vocalist throughout the city. He became a founding member of Havana NRG in 2002.

Ramón Rodríguez is the group's Havana-born bass player. His passion for the music began around the age of 11, while performing with different local bands in his community. He studied percussion at the National School of the Arts in Havana, graduating as Instructor of the Arts in

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1982. Soon thereafter, he joined the group Cubanacán as its bass player. In 1991, Rodríguez was recruited to play bass with Mirtha Medina's band, and later became the musical director for said vocalist. Together they toured throughout México until 1993, when they came to the United States. While living in Miami, Rodríguez participated in numerous recordings and collaborations with Roberto Torres, Albita, Trío Habanero, and Guianko. In 2000, he relocated to Dallas, working as a bassist and percussion instructor. He became a founding member of Havana NRG in 2002.

Jeff Fort is a native of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and the group's saxophone and flute player. He started playing at the age of 16, briefly attending music school before being hired to play for Carnival Cruise Lines. After three years of performing on cruise ships, he relocated to Denton, Texas, to complete his music studies. Fort graduated from the University of North Texas in 2001, and immediately started working in the local Latin music scene. In 2002, he also became a founding member of Havana NRG.

Georber Nodal was born in Matanzas, Cuba, and plays trumpet for the band. His interest in music started around the age of nine, playing guitar and percussion with local groups. He attended the Vocational School of the Arts in Matanzas, specializing in the trumpet. He furthered his studies at the National School of the Arts in Havana, graduating in 1995 with a degree in "Trumpet Performance." He worked with many of Matanzas' top bands and artists, as well as at the tourist-oriented venues of Varadero Beach. In 2000, he relocated to Miami, Florida, where he performed with artists such as Luis Enrique, Elvis Crespo, Jaci Velázquez, Gisselle, and Gilberto Santa Rosa. In 2002, Nodal moved to Dallas, where he rapidly worked his way into the Latin music scene. In 2004, he joined Havana NRG.

Completing the band are percussionists **Frank La Rosa, a.k.a. El Chama** (bongó/timbal) and **Ulises Hernández** (congas), both natives of Havana.

The following is a transcription of our recent chat with Havana NRG's bandleader, Mariela Suárez..

Rudy Mangual: Do you consider Havana NRG a Cuban music band?

Mariela Suárez: While seven of our current eight members are of Cuban heritage, I guess we are a Cuban band but our repertoire incorporates rhythms and genres from the entire Caribbean and most of Latin America. While our Cuban roots may dominate our performances, we balance our sets by always including merengues, cumbias, bachatas, etc.

Our audiences in Dallas and throughout most of the cities we perform in regularly are multi-national and generally of Mexican and Latin American heritage.



RM: What forms and styles do you and the band prefer to play and compose?

MS: We like timba, which is the Cuban music of our generation, but we have learned to interpret it in a simpler form, more universal, more dance-friendly and accessible to all audiences. We also enjoy performing classic salsa tunes and more traditional Cuban forms, such as son muntuno, chachachá, pilón and rumba.

RM: What are the group's main musical influences?

MS: Our main influences include Los Van Van, Manolito y su Trabuco, and Klimax, as well as Juan Luis Guerra and El Gran Combo de Puerto Rico. As musicians, we are influenced by all genres and styles, as long as it is well done.



RM: Can you describe *Receta Perfecta* (Perfect Recipe)?

MS: This new production reveals our secret formula of combining many genres and styles into all our performances and productions, a practice we have been using from the genesis of the band. The new recording includes scores arranged in the styles of timba, modern salsa, traditional chachachá, son muntuno and pilón, as well as merengue, bachata, and even a timbatón (a hybrid of timba and reggaetón). The main reason behind this logic is not to be cornered into one specific genre or style by our audiences, so that we can be accessible to a wider general public and market.

RM: How do you see the current state of Cuban music?

MS: There's very little exposure in the United States to most Cuban musicians of the last couple of decades, mainly due to travel restrictions imposed by the current U.S. embargo. Most U.S. residents only know of Celia Cruz and La Sonora Matancera and Paquito D'Rivera and Arturo Sandoval, who have been here for a while. However, most people are unaware of the changes and evolution of popular Cuban music on the island itself. While our generation of Cuban musicians came over with new musical tendencies and tries to stay up to date on what's happening musically in the island, the U.S. audiences are slow to accept these musical expressions. In my opinion, the state and popularity of Cuban music is alive and well in its homeland and internationally, with the exception of the United States.

RM: Describe a common day in the life of the members of Havana NRG.

MS: Most of the members of Havana NRG are music teachers, keeping busy with their students as well as with their own families. We normally rehearse one day a week, if our weekly schedule permits it, and try to spend as much time as we can with our families.



RM: How is the salsa music scene in Dallas,

Texas?

MS: The salsa movement in Dallas and its neighboring cities is very strong, with many salsa dancers and orchestras performing regularly. We are very proud of being a motivating part of this movement and having nourished the scene for the past 10 years.

RM: Is there a tour planned to promote the new CD?

MS: Yes, we are planning a promotional tour, nationally and internationally, with presentations in major festivals this coming summer season. If you are in the Dallas area, we perform regularly at Gloria's Restaurant in the community of Addison.



JOSÉ M. HERNÁNDEZ: Capturing a Culture

By Rudy Mangua

For more than a half-century, José M. Hernández has been documenting and capturing the essence of the New York City Latin music and entertainment scene through the lens of his camera. A native of Santurce, Puerto Rico, Hernández grew up in the Bronx, surrounded by a Latino community vividly immersed in its musical culture, in the midst of New York City's urban jungle. He credits free-lance photographer Sol Laskowitz (who gave Hernández his first camera) for introducing him to photography and changing his world forever. Fascinated by the process of capturing images by light falling on a light-sensitive surface (initially photographic film, and more recently on electronic imagers such as CCDs or CMOS chips), Hernández developed a distinct personal photographic style through hands-on training and a natural eye. His images tell a story as they capture the true essence of its subjects. His early works include two album covers for the popular Grupo Folklórico y Experimental Nuevayorquino in 1975, and shots of numerous iconic Latin music stars, from the colorful Celia Cruz to a sweat-drenched Tito Puente in the middle of one of his legendary timbal solos. His portfolio includes distinguished Hollywood celebrities such as Rita Moreno (who Hernández has befriended for two decades), and Jimmy Smits, as well as Latin music luminaries such as Tito Rodríguez, Vicentico Valdés, Machito and his Afro-Cubans, Johnny Albino, Ednita Nazario, Cachao, Danny Rivera, Mongo Santamaría, Cal Tjader, Willie Bobo, Iris Chacón, Dave Valentín, Los Papines de Cuba, Rubén Blades, Charlie and Eddie Palmieri, Pete "El Conde" Rodríguez, Cheo Feliciano, Ray Barretto, Yomo Toro, Marc Anthony, India, Spanish Harlem Orchestra, Lalo Rodríguez, Cita Rodríguez, Tito Nieves, Seis del Solar, Conjunto Libre, Ray de la Paz, Eddy & Eddy, and Eddie Montalvo, among many others. Hernández works with Latina models such as Dorean Beltrán, Vicky Lynn Vásquez, Samantha Hernández, Gina Guzmán, Sabrina Claudio and Sophia Rosado.

His images have graced the pages of numerous newspapers and publications, including Latin

Beat Magazine, Films In Review, Daily News, Down Beat, Modern Recording Magazine, Horizons Community College News, El Sol Spanish News, Canales Magazine, El Diario, Boston Tab, and Sangre Nueva Magazine. Hernández claims that his main inspirations are derived from his love and passion for his own culture, Afro-Caribbean rhythms and jazz. His work ethic philosophy is: "I would rather capture artists in their own environment, where they feel comfortable." That's why he rarely books studio space for his sessions. While Hernández currently calls South Amboy (New Jersey) home, his heart and personal talents still belong to the streets of New York City, where his photographic career developed and matured throughout the years.

Following are some of his pictures. ©José Hernández



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