

Columns ⊕ ⊕ ⊕

MARCH 2011 ISSUE

QUE PASA IN LA

By Rudy Mangual

The City of Angels' largest and most popular annual gathering of salsa lovers and aficionados from all corners of the world, aka Albert Torres Productions "**13th Annual Los Angeles Salsa Congress & Bachata Room**" (hosted by Island Touch), is scheduled to take place on May 26 through May 29, 2011 at its new home "The Five Star Westin Bonaventure Hotel" in Downtown Los Angeles. "The Salsa Congress where stars are discovered this year goes beyond the limits!" Live salsa bands every evening including performances by Victor Manuelle and his orchestra from Puerto Rico; Grupo Latin Vibe from New York City; Bachata group Xtreme; plus local favorites Johnny Polanco y su Conjunto Amistad (with special guest Choco Orta directly from Puerto Rico), and Chino Espinoza y Los Dueños del Son.

Over 100 dance performances are scheduled, plus 65 workshops, daily pool dance parties with international salsa DJs, and rooms to social dance during all shows. Special workshops include classes by Griselle Ponce, Eddie Torres, Juan Matos, and Johnny Vazquez, among others. For tickets and reservations, visit www.mysalsacongress.com.

The 33rd Annual Playboy Jazz Festival will be held Saturday, June 11 and Sunday, June 12, 2011 at the landmark Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles, California. Latinos headlining the festival this year include Eddie Palmieri (pictured in front of piano) and his Salsa Orchestra (directly from New York City), singer/composer Carlos Varela (pictured, from Cuba), and saxophonist David Sánchez (from Puerto Rico, performing with the San Francisco Jazz Collective). Jazz headliners include Dianne Reeves, Fourplay, Buddy Guy, John Scofield and Robben Ford, Stanley Jordan, and Naturally 7, among many others. Bill Cosby is back as Master of Ceremonies. For tickets and more information, visit www.playboyjazzfestival.com or www.ticketmaster.com.





The Playboy Jazz Festival will once again present its acclaimed annual community concert series in keeping with its commitment to make jazz accessible to as many Angelino music fans as possible. The free series of events will be held during the months of May and June in Beverly Hills, Warner Center, and mid-city Los Angeles. This year's performers include Justo Almario's Afro-Colombian Ensemble, and the Tamir Hendelman Trio performing on Sunday, May 1st at the Beverly Hills Civic Center Plaza at 3:30 pm.

Patrice Rushen and Ndugu Chancler with special guest Doc Powell

Johnny Polanco y su Conjunto Amistad

Nikhil Korula Band

and the Calabasas High School Band on Sunday, June 5th at the Warner Center Park, Lou Bredlow Pavilion in Woodland Hills.

Jazz on Film with Ebony Repertory Theatre at the Nate Holden Performing Arts Center in Los Angeles on

Wednesday, June 8, at 7:30 pm. (An evening of rare and often never-before-seen jazz footage and musical rarities hosted by noted jazz archivist Mark Cantor)

Also around town: Johnny Polanco y su Conjunto Amistad (A Tribute To Tito Puente) on March 9th at Cafe Sevilla in Riverside.

El Gran Combo de Puerto Rico takes the stage of The Conga Room at L.A. Live in Downtown on March 10th.

The group Afro-Son performs at The Granada in the city of Alhambra on March 18th.

Chino Espinoza y Los Dueños del Son will be performing a "Tribute to Héctor Lavoe" on April 13th at Cafe Sevilla in Riverside.

Omar Sosa Afreecanos will be at The Getty in Los Angeles on May 14th.

Roberto Torres performs at the Frank G. Bonelli Park in San Dimas on May 15th.

Support all your local artists and their venues. Live music and arts rules!



A Bite from the Apple

By Vicki Sola

New Yorkers have endured plenty of snow, ice, and more snow, with chill winds whipping through the Apple's concrete canyons and beyond, but the **Mambo Legends Orchestra** (comprised of former musicians of Tito Puente's orchestra) has been heating things up with its new double-CD *Watch Out! Ten Cuidao!*



This latest release, which lives in my car's stereo system when it's not spinning in WFDU-FM's machines, features elegant arrangements penned by José Madera, Ricky González, Sonny Bravo, Oscar Hernández, Louis Bauzó, Angel Fernández, and Richie Viruet, plus incomparable vocals delivered by Frankie Vásquez, Cita Rodríguez, Marco Bermúdez, and Jorge Maldonado.

It must be noted that Cita Rodríguez (daughter of the late Pete "El Conde" Rodríguez) sounds more spectacular than ever, in my humble opinion. Although she is endowed with her own dynamic and unique vocal style, I detect subtle hints of her late father's phrasings, and a certain Graciela-influenced quality. I am thrilled to witness how such a mega-talented is gaining greater exposure.

Frankie Vásquez is not only a true, gritty sonero, but he can also sing with a "suave" crooning style, as demonstrated on the track titled "Funny."

Of course, I love the pairing of Rodríguez and Vásquez on *La Manguera*. Other numbers I keep playing are Adalberto Alvarez's *Háblame Ahora* (props to Fernández for that arrangement), and Jesús Guerra's *¿Dónde Va María?*.

A missing element in many contemporary productions is the inclusion of pertinent solos, but this recording allows plenty of improvisational contributions properly performed by Pete Nater and John Walsh (trumpets), Peter Brainin (tenor sax), Mitch Frohman (tenor sax and flute), Sonny Bravo (piano), Jimmy Bosch, Tokunori and Sam Burtis (trombones), John "Dandy" Rodríguez (bongó), José Madera (timbal), George Delgado (congas), Vito Chiavuzzo (soprano sax), and Bobby Porcelli (alto sax).

In my estimation, *Watch Out! Ten Cuidao!*— dedicated to the memory of Tito Puente's close friend and business partner, Vincent Jimmy Frisaura—, is certainly Grammy material.

Colette Michaan defines her second release, *Querencia* (Creatrix Music), as "Cuban son and Latin jazz with an Arabic flavor." A New Yorker of Arabic ancestry, this flutist/composer/vocalist has been influenced by multiple Cuban/ Caribbean, Brazilian, African, Asian, and North American genres.

Performing and composing since 1978 with her own group, while freelancing with others, Michaan was part of the iconic Village Vanguard's staff for three years, when she consistently received inspiration from many musical greats.

Michaan has performed with Kenny Barron (India's Jazz Yatra Festival, in New Delhi and Bombay), Hubert Laws (Opus 40, in New York), Richard Bona (St. Louis Festival, in Senegal), Youssou N'Dour (Thiossane, in Dakar, Senegal), and with her own ensemble at the United Nations. A past member of the New School and Contemporary Music Program's instrumental faculty, she played flute with Charanga Soleil, and now performs weekly with Nu' Guajiro/Nu' Dlux. She has studied both Yoruban folklore and the sacred chants of Burma and Indonesia, and has been taught by John Stubblefield, Barry Harris, Frank Weiss, Richard Egües, and Oriente López. Her first CD, *First Cause*, was released in 2004.



This sophomore effort features Edgar Pantoja (piano, keyboards, karkaba), Yunion Terry (bass, violin), Jorge Bringas (bass), Hassan Hakmoun (sintir, lead vocal), Aaron Halva (tres), Jainardo Batista (lead vocals), and Pedro Martínez (congas, timbal, güiro, udu).

"*Querencia*," as explained by Michaan in her liner notes, "names that place within each one of us where one is safe and can claim one's strength and power. It is that place where one lets go of fear and gathers strength, from that inner space of refuge, presence, and renewal."

DJ Jeff's "Hot Pick of the Month": The Mambo Legends Orchestra's *Dónde Va María*.

A sad note... After twenty-two years, González y González has closed its doors, leaving a tremendous void in the musical community. The establishment held a "farewell night" on January 31st, featuring performances by Héctor Montalvo & Salsa Major, Grupo Latin Vibe, Zone del Barrio, and Willie Villegas & Entre Amigos.

Around town... Latin jazz continues on Wednesday nights at Willie's Steakhouse, in the Bronx. Recently, Willie Rodríguez & Friends played such Westchester Avenue venue.

"Salsa Con Caché" Thursdays are happening at the Brooklyn Crossroads Supper Club, presenting bands like Dave Santiago & Latin Affair, Gilberto Colón, Jr. & Ensalada de Pulpo, Toby Rivera's orchestra, and Sergio Rivera & Grupo Caribe.

Across the Hudson... On January 30th, Los Hermanos Moreno offered an exciting show at

The Whiskey Café. Their ever-charismatic director, Nelson Moreno, delighted attendees by venturing out into the crowd, playing his trombone. This venue (located in Lyndhurst, New Jersey) will present Grupo Latin Vibe on March 27th.

The West Gate Lounge's March roster includes Wayne Gorbea's Salsa Picante, Orquesta Son 9, and Toby Rivera.

¡Hasta la próxima!



Latin Beat Update

By Nelson Rodriguez

Hopefully, this will be a year of healing for many of us, as it is evident that music can be a source of joy and peace. But before we get into the new Latin CDs that we recommend this month, let's talk about a book that has tongues wagging —“**Mambo Diablo: My Journey With Tito Puente,**” authored by Joe Conzo (in conjunction with David A. Perez), is a fantastic reading experience from beginning to end, as Conzo relates his decades-long relationship with Puente (pictured) and reveals true facts that too many of us heard from others, but not from the man himself. This is an enlightening book that corrects much erroneous information that was previously generated. It is written in a humorous style that keeps the reader turning each page with anticipation. This is not for the faint of heart, as Conzo tells it like it was!



We begin our list of recommended recordings with a family affair! I received a CD by The **O’Farrill Brothers** and immediately thought, “Oh wow! Arturo (O’Farrill) had a brother I didn’t know!” but eventually realized that it was recorded by Arturo’s sons —Adam (trumpet) and Zach (drums). So what we have here is a third generation in a quintet format straight-ahead debut titled *Giant Peach* (Zoho). On the other hand, **Arturo O’Farrill & The Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra’s** *40 Acres and a Burro*, also on the Zoho Music label, is characterized by its Latin jazz, big band approach, as documented on the tracks *Rumba Urbana*, *A Wise Latina*, *Almendra* and *A Night in Tunisia*.

Adriel’s *Como Debe Ser* is bound to please all fans of salsa music. I enjoyed listening to *Temo*, *Ahora Si*, *Ritmo*, *Tambor y Flores*, *Quién Como Ella* and *Buscando Una Nena*.

One of last year’s hottest bands was the Barcelona-based **Bloque 53**, and this year they hit hard with a swinging set titled *Te Hace Mover Los Pies*, and as such title indicates, you will dance your tush off. As musical producers, percussionist Joaquín Arteaga and pianist Andreu

Canadell do a wonderful job on the title track, as well as on *Yo Soy La Salsa*, *Cangrejo*, and many more.

Victoria Sanabria is back with the compilation *Mi Décima...Con Orquesta*, containing ten tracks from her four CDs, including her latest (*Criollo con Salsa*, one of 2010's best conceptual recordings).

My favorite Latin jazz release of 2010 belonged to flautist **Mark Weinstein**, who now offers the CD *Jazz Brasil*, a quartet production that includes pianist Kenny Barron and is destined to be another historical gem for Weinstein.

Wayne Wallace and his Latin Jazz Quintet: The Grammy-nominated trombonist, composer, and arranger Wayne Wallace puts his unique stamp on the CD "To Hear From There" by combining old-school descargas, hard-hitting timba, great Latin jazz, Afro-Cuban folkloric themes, and much more. Wallace has become one of the true inspirational leaders of his generation.

While bachata only garners commercial airplay in the USA, the genre has some great acts that just don't get a break in the airwaves.... So, what's new? We like to explore all the awesome vocalists and groups that have emerged recently, as exemplified by the band led by **Lexx & Joell** (Elexicofero Esposito and Joel Jesús García), whose compositional skills are revealed on the tracks *La Pregunta*, *Quiero Tener* and *Me Olvidaste*, to be included in their upcoming debut CD.

Other upcoming projects include a great salsa/Latin jazz recording being finalized by percussionist **Jimmy Morales**, whom I met in the mid-1980s, when he and Gilberto Santa Rosa were members of the Willie Rosario Orchestra, along with Tony Vega and Humberto Ramírez. Upon listening to the tracks *Píntame Los Labios* and *The Continental* (both arranged by José Lugo), one can predict that this new project will be one of the best of 2011.

Another top candidate comes from a timbal-playing salsero that now debuts as a Latin jazz bandleader: **Edwin Clemente's** *Viva Clemente-3D Zone* has a classic line-up that includes David Sánchez, Paoli Mejías, Endel Dueño, Frankie Pérez, William "Kachiro" Thompson, Cheguito Encarnación, Joe "Furito" Rios and many more!

Thanks to Raúl Rico Jr. for putting me in contact with a new talented band led by pianist/flutist/vocalist **Gilberto Torres**. Their CD *Something Different* was recorded live at the California State University of Long Beach's Bob Cole Conservatory of Music.

Charlie Cruz is one of those vocalists that appeared during the 1990s, and he has sustained himself thereafter through his recordings. He does it again with another fine project, *Sigo Aquí*. The track *Mi Rumba* features guest Richie Flores on timbal and conga.

Trombonist **Moisés Cancel**, a veteran of many bands and recordings in Puerto Rico (Bobby Valentín, Roberto Roena, Tommy Olivencia, Cheo Feliciano, La Mulenze, La Solución) just released *Guaracha Jíbara* (also the name of his band) that blends salsa with the typical Puerto Rican sound.

Vocalist **Kayvan Vega** is another young talent making a name for himself in Puerto Rico with his debut *Bien Chévere*, including the hits *Loquita Pero Chevere* and *Soy de los que Son*.

Panchito never fails to surprise us and his latest CD, *Las Últimas Canciones*, allows his band to stretch out on my favorite tracks – *Secrets*, *El Punto de No-Regreso*, *Persecución*, *Lo Pico Ahora* and *El Viaje al Sur*. This is a must-have for any Latin jazz fan, as it features guest trumpeter Michel Simon plus the following additional soloists: Andre van Berlo (guitar), Rein Godefrory (piano), Kwint van Dijck (alto sax), Louk Boudesteijn (trombone) and Martijn de Laat (trumpet).

Percussionist **Nils Fischer** has teamed up with Cape Verdean pianist **Carlos Matos** to form the group **CaboCuba Jazz**, an creating an unprecedented fusion of Cape Verdean mona and coladera styles with a heavy dose of Cuban rumba, salsa and jazz, thus giving birth to a new hybrid genre! *Rikeza y Valor* also highlights the talents of guests Brian Lynch, Pepe Espinosa, and the internationally renowned Cape Verdean singers Grace Evora and Dina Medina.

A correction pertaining to **Sonido Criminal's** CD *Crime Payz*: It was produced and arranged by leader Carlos Mojica, who lost his parents at a young age, and was raised by his grandparents in Florida, often landing in jail during his torrid youth for crimes he regrets today! Such learning experiences, however, inspired him to record this wonderful CD.



DESDE BORINQUEN

Por Elmer González



JAZZ EN LAS MONTAÑAS. El pasado 13 de febrero el saxofonista Miguel Zenón presentó la música de Miles Davis en el Centro Cultural de Barranquitas, pueblo ubicado en la Cordillera Central de Puerto Rico. Fue una iniciativa del artista para llevar el jazz en forma gratuita a ciertas comarcas de la isla donde no se difunde ni se presenta tal género musical.

Antes del inicio del concierto, un nutrido grupo de personas concurre a una charla educativa que generó suficiente interés para que la mayoría de los que asistieron se quedaran a presenciar el recital programado (y en muchos casos, a escuchar jazz “en vivo” por primera vez).

Esgrimiendo su saxo alto, Zenón se presentó con un quinteto que también incluía a los siguientes jazzistas: el pianista Aaron Goldberg, el bajista Mat Pennman, el trompetista Mike Rodríguez, y el baterista Nasheet Waits.

El concierto forma parte de un proyecto de dos años de duración denominado “Caravana Cultural,” cuyo objetivo principal (según explica el antedicho saxofonista en su página en la Red) es “llevar música directamente al público, dejando a un lado cualquier interés económico, publicitario o político”. Añade que al enfocarse directamente en el jazz, intenta “eliminar cualquier estigma social o cultural con que se pueda relacionar este estilo, al igual que se busca llevar esta música a lugares donde el público ha tenido poca o ninguna oportunidad de apreciarla”.

Según declaró la esposa de Zenón, Elga Castro, (quien figuró también como colaboradora en este proyecto), el protagonista del disco “Esta Plena” ya venía madurando la idea de estos conciertos desde hace cierto tiempo, inspirado por la misma iniciativa que tuvo, en algún momento dado, el grupo de rock-fusión de Islandia llamado “Sigur Rós”.

“A Miguel le gusta el trabajo de Sigur Rós y supo que después de viajar a través del mundo y alcanzar fama, esta banda dedicó un tiempo a presentarse gratis en ciertos lugares de su país natal”, señaló Castro, quien añadió lo siguiente: “A Miguel le gustó la idea de hacer lo mismo en Puerto Rico”. Según nos informó Castro, el nombre del concepto (Caravana Cultural) hace referencia al estándar jazzístico “Caravan,” compuesto por el puertorriqueño Juan Tizol, ilustre miembro de la banda de Duke Ellington.

Durante el 2011, Zenón presentará otros dos conciertos en su isla natal. El próximo se realizará el 12 de junio en el pueblo de Adjuntas, situado en el centro de Borinquen. Allí presentará música del repertorio del legendario Charlie Parker. Lo acompañarán el pianista Gerald Clayton, el bajista Ben Williams y el baterista Kendrick Scott. Más adelante, el 2 de octubre, presentará la música de Ornette Coleman en el pueblo cafetalero de Yauco, localizado al sur de la isla.

Miguel Zenón es el más aventajado de los saxofonistas puertorriqueños de jazz. Su talento y disciplina le han ganado el elogio y la admiración de los más entendidos. Zenón ha recibido múltiples reconocimientos, entre los cuales se encuentra el MacArthur Grant de 2008, una dádiva que le permite sufragar parte de los costos de la mencionada serie de conciertos. De origen humilde, Zenón logró desarrollar su carrera académica con becas de instituciones tan prestigiosas como Berklee School of Music y Manhattan School of Music, después de graduarse de la Escuela Libre de Música en San Juan. Varias grabaciones de Zenón han sido nominadas al Premio Grammy. Actualmente dirige su propio cuarteto, y también a formado parte del octeto San Francisco Jazz Collective a partir del 2004.

