

Columns ⊕ ⊕ ⊕

MAY 2011 ISSUE

QUE PASA IN LA

By Rudy Mangual



The iconic salsa and Latin jazz giant **Eddie Palmieri** will be headlining this year's **33rd Playboy Jazz Festival** at the Hollywood Bowl, performing with his powerhouse salsa orchestra on Saturday, June 11. Enjoying a musical career that spans more than 50 years, the Puerto Rican native of Spanish Harlem, New York City, is the recipient of nine Grammy Awards, 36 albums as a leader, and numerous national and international awards for his contributions to Latin music. Inspired greatly by his older brother Charlie Palmieri (a pioneering Latin music pianist/bandleader), Eddie broke into the

Latin music scene as a leader in 1961 with his legendary band “La Perfecta” (a trombone-powered band). His dissonant yet flavorful percussive piano style quickly earned him followers and fans everywhere. Palmieri earned his first Grammy Award in 1975 for his album *The Sun of Latin Music*, a recording that also marked the first time NARAS recognized a Latin music production. He was also instrumental in creating a new category at the awards for Latin jazz music in 1995 (category which has been recently deleted from the Grammys). In 1998, the annual Heineken Jazz Festival in San Juan, Puerto Rico, paid tribute to Palmieri’s contributions as a bandleader bestowing him an honorary doctorate degree from the Berklee College of Music. The Playboy Jazz Festival is going to ignite once Palmieri and his salsa orchestra take to the stage. Performing on Sunday, June 12, directly from Cuba is **Carlos Varela** and his group.

On Memorial Day Weekend, all roads lead to Downtown Los Angeles to the annual **Los Angeles Salsa Congress**, this year celebrating its 13th anniversary. From May 26 through May 29, 2011, this mammoth music and dance event transforms the City of Angels into the epicenter of all things “Salsa”. Live bands nightly include **Victor Manuelle** and his orchestra directly from Puerto Rico, **Grupo Latin Vibes** from New York City, local favorites **Chino Espinoza y Los Dueños del Son**, and **Johnny Polanco y su Conjunto Amistad** with special guest **Choco Orta**. A Bachata room will feature the popular band **Xtreme** (from New York City), and the Dominican band **Grupo Secreto**, plus daily pool parties with international DJs. This year’s congress brings more than 65 salsa dance workshops; rooms to social dance during the daily shows; over 100 dance performances; **Griselle Ponce’s** special immersion course (9 Hours), and the participation of fame salsa dance instructors **Eddie Torres**, **Juan Matos** and **Johnny Vazquez**, among many others. Everything takes place at the new home of the Los Angeles Salsa Congress, The Five Star Westin Bonaventure Hotel in Downtown L.A. For tickets and more information, visit www.mysalsacongress.com.

Other events happening around town include: José Rizo’s **Mongorama** at the Laguna Playhouse, in Laguna Beach on May 4.

Cinco de Mayo celebration will take place on May 5th at The Bonaventure Brewing Company located at the 4th floor of the Westin Bonaventure Hotel in Downtown Los Angeles. This special event includes tequila tasting, live mariachis, ballet folklórico, Aztec dancers, an art exhibition and salsa dancing to the sounds of **Johnny Polanco y su Conjunto Amistad**.

The group **Sangre Nueva** performs at the landmark El Floridita Restaurant in Hollywood on Saturday, May 7th.

The Borinquen Post 508 presents **Mother’s Day Salsa Dance** on Saturday, May 7th at the American Legion 790 in West Covina. Music will be provided by **Orquesta Tabaco y Ron** and DJ “Papo” **El Salsero**. For tickets and reservations, call (909) 633-9812 or (626) 919-5553.

Susie Hansen Latin Band will be performing at the Lakewood Pan American Fiesta at Mayfair Park in the city of Lakewood on May 7th.

Louie Cruz Beltran and his Latin Jazz Band will be featured at LACMA on June 11th.

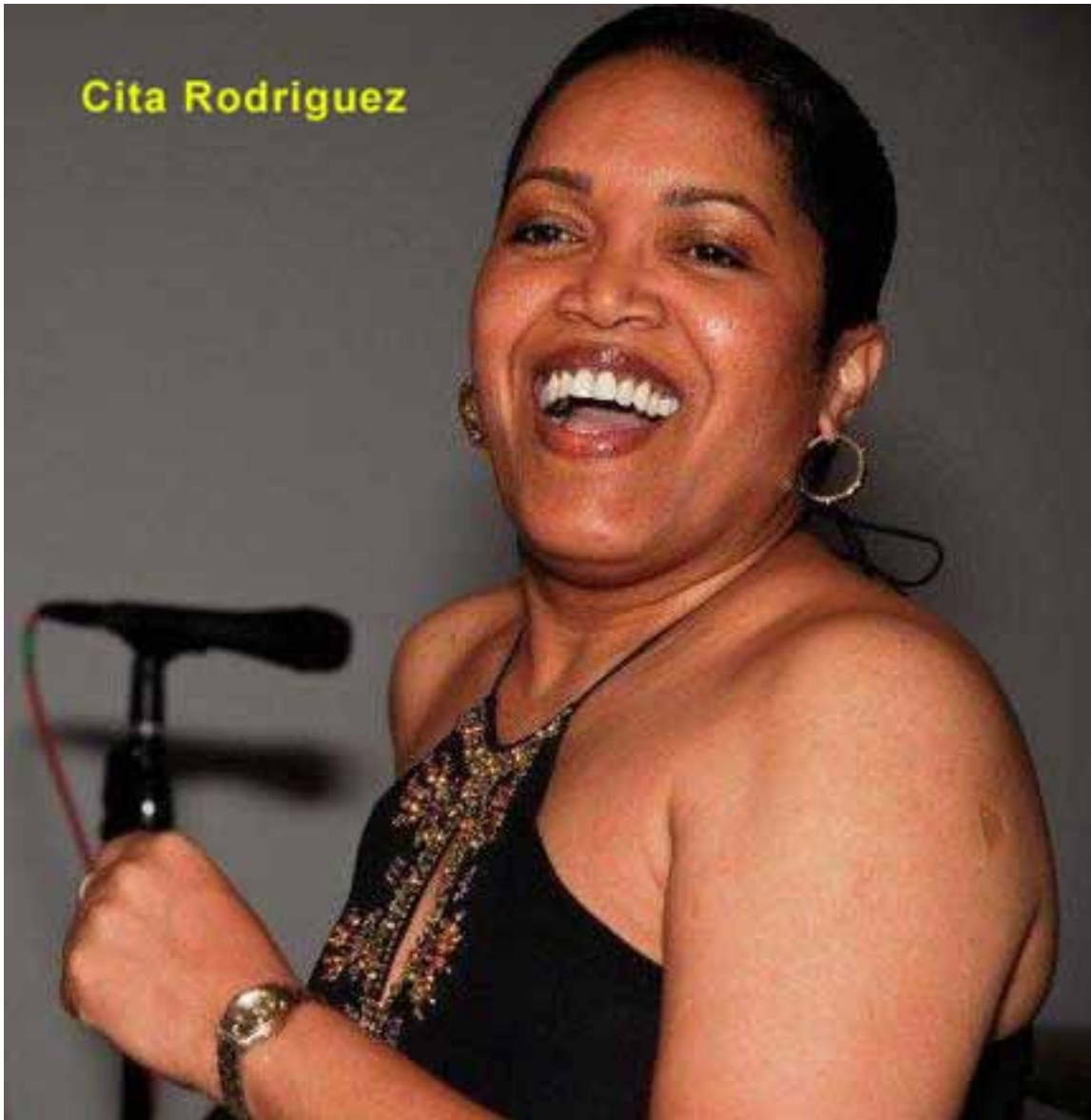
Dia de San Juan Festival will be held on June 12th at the Frank G. Bonelli Park in the city of San Dimas. Headlining the festival will be salsa singers **Frankie Vázquez**, **Michael Stuart**, and **Ray de la Paz**.

Continue supporting all your local artists and their venues. Peace.



A Bite from the Apple

By Vicki Sola



In last month's column, I mentioned how thrilled I was to see **Cita Rodríguez** (daughter of the late icon Pete "El Conde" Rodríguez) gain greater exposure after singing on the Mambo Legends' last two CDs. I've always been wowed by her talent and charismatic showmanship, and will never forget watching her performance, backed by her own band, at the now-defunct La Maganette.

In my opinion, Cita Rodríguez is the best female vocalist in today's Latin New York scene, as she blends influences from her father and Graciela with her own unmistakable style.

Born in the Bronx to Pete and Frances Rodríguez, Cita Rodríguez attended East Harlem's Harbor School, where she studied flute and sang in the chorus. In 1979, along with her parents and younger sibling Pete, she moved to Puerto Rico, where she continued her flute lessons at the Escuela Libre de Música. At the age of sixteen, she began singing with her illustrious father, with whom he traveled to Venezuela. By the following year, she was enrolled in the Conservatorio de Música de Puerto Rico, and soon joined Los Hijos de la Salsa, with whom she recorded four albums and traveled to Ecuador and Venezuela.

Pete “El Conde” Rodríguez moved back to New York in 1991, and formed a group that featured Cita and her brother singing backup vocals. In 1994, following the recording of *Generaciones*, the band performed all over the city.

After her father’s sudden demise in 2000, Cita started her own group, which is currently directed by percussionist Harry Adorno. She has been a backup singer for Tito Puente and Jimmy Bosch, and recalls providing background vocals on certain recordings for Viento de Agua and William Cepeda.

Cita Rodríguez is also an educator. She earned a Master’s Degree in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) from the City College of New York, and for the past fifteen years, she has taught in New York City’s elementary schools.



Laser luster... Trombonist **David Chamberlain** has just released *Band of Bones*, a production featuring eight trombones plus a rhythm section.

“*Band of Bones*”, says Chamberlain, “is a project that I created over a period of more than thirty years. I’ve had regular trombone ensemble rehearsals since the late 1970s, and we’ve even done a few concerts of mostly classical music. Little by little, I got some jazz arrangements that required a rhythm section.”

Amazed by what came forth during the group’s first combined rehearsal, back in October of 2008, Chamberlain knew that he had to record it and share it with the world. “Because of my love of Latin jazz,” points out the trombonist, “I decided to include four Latin jazz arrangements as well. Chembo Corniel plays congas and other percussion on these cuts.”

El Manicero, a Moisés Simons classic that Chamberlain included in his first recording as leader of the dance band DLI (Direct Latin Influence), is given a different treatment by the Band of Bones. Chamberlain transcribed the Dizzy Gillespie/Chano Pozo standard *Night in Tunisia* from the original J.J. Johnson/Kai Winding recording. *Girl from Ipanema* was arranged by band member Bob Suttman,

and trombonist James Zeller did the honors on Cedar Walton's *Bolivia*.

Chamberlain and DLI will perform at Manhattan's Edison Ballroom on May 13th and 20th.



New blood... Bongocero **Larry Umaña**, who has accompanied Frankie Vásquez and the late Héctor Casanova, can organize a band for any particular musical need. Larry Umaña y su Pequeño Son happens to be his own favorite format, but he can supply a Latin jazz trio, quartet, or quintet, as well as a twelve-piece dance orchestra, if needed. Umaña's Pequeño Son — one of the hottest hardcore salsa bands in the area — has featured musicians like José Tabares, José Dávila, Renzo Padilla, Igor Atalita, Willie Romero, Kevin Pagán and Jesús "Chuti" Serrano.

DJ Jeff's "Hot Pick of the Month": The Spanish Harlem Orchestra's *Regalo de Dios*.

Around town... Cuban piano virtuoso and Chucho Valdés protégé **Dayramir González** makes his U.S. debut on May 13th at the Hostos Center for the Arts and Culture. Vocalist Thelma Ithier, daughter of El Gran Combo's Rafael Ithier, is slated to accompany González, as he demonstrates his pianistic versatility, while he presents the works of Cervantes, Lecuona, Bobby Carcassés, Julio Padrón, and Chucho Valdés, plus his own compositions.

On Thursday evenings, **Annette Aguilar's** group performs at Apartment 78, located at 4447 Broadway, in Manhattan's Washington Heights, as part of said venue's Latin Jazz Series.

On May 29th, Westbury's Winner's Circle (in Long Island) presents **Luisito Rosario and his Orchestra**.

The West Gate Lounge features Jimmy Sabater Jr. & New York Sabor (May 7th), Luisito Carrión (May 14th), Conjunto Imagen (celebrating its 23rd Anniversary on May 21st), and directly from Puerto Rico, Paquito Guzmán (May 28th).

¡Hasta la próxima!



Latin Beat Update

By Nelson Rodriguez

Latin Beat Magazine still remains the primordial source for news and updates pertaining to what is happening throughout the world of Latin music.

Jorge Emilio Hasbun's Santiago All-Stars (a Chilean band highlighted in the October issue of Latin Beat) brings forth its CD *Joyas y Rarezas*, featuring arrangements penned by Ricky Gonzalez and guest vocal appearances by Jimmy Sabater and Frankie Vásquez

Frankie Morales' new CD (*No Te Equivoques...Es Frankie Morales*) includes the classic Justo Betancourt tune *No Estás En Nada*, featuring vocalists Ray Viera, Sammy González, Luisito Ayala, Ray Sepulveda and Yoko (La Japonesa).

Javier Plaza & Orquesta Son-Risa have released one of the best CDs that have emerged this year: *Con Sabor a Coco* contains the potential radio/club hits *El Genio*, *Fiesta de Soneros*, *Guaguancó Pa'l 23*, *Disfraz de Rojo* and *Pa'l Sonero Mayor*.



Charito is a new voice in jazz that has recorded a Michael Jackson tribute CD, *Heal the World*, including a Latin version of *I Can't Help It*, which features guest flutist Hubert Laws, who is no stranger to Latin jazz.

A new young vocalist who impressed me with his vocal chops (reminiscent of Domingo Quiñones) goes simply by the name of **Nelson** and has released not one but two CDs with distinctively different styles: The CD *Homenaje a Los Bravos* contains various Ismael Rivera classics and covers of *Esa Mujer*,

Amada Mia and *El Cantante*, while the second disc, *Vamos a La Salsa*, is entirely comprised of new musical material, with modern arrangements.

Janeen Puente is doing the right thing in her debut CD *Mi Camino*, which includes the hit *Coquetona*, plus the post-mortem tribute *Homenaje a Celia*, La Lupe's *Oriente* and Brenda K. Starr's *I Still Believe*.

A good friend asked me about the recent passing of **George Shearing**, and it brought back memories of this piano legend, who was one of my early Latin jazz influences. Shearing's *Latin Escapade*, *Latin Affair*, *George Shearing and The Montgomery Brothers*, *Satin Latin*, *Mood Latino*, *A Shearing Caravan*, *The Shearing Spell*, *Shearing On Stage*, *San Francisco Scene*, *Shearing in HiFi*, *Latin Lace* and *Latin Rendezvous* are some of my favorites recordings, and they can still be picked up in vinyl!

When violinist **Gregor Huebner** moved to New York in 1994, his goal was to be involved in the jazz scene, but the Cuban charanga revival in New York that was ignited by Johnny Almendra's *Jóvenes del Barrio* motivated him to become a member of that particular charanga ensemble. Today, he offers a bandleading debut, *El Violín Latino* which explores three of his primordial romances: the music of Brazil, Cuba and Argentina.

Many ladies have made their bandleading debut in the past decade with their respective salsa and Latin jazz releases, but only a few have maintained stable careers. One who has been doing so for the past two decades and continues to grow with each additional recording is **Choco Orta**, who excels on her latest CD *Choco Swings*. This recording contains some fine tunes, including *Lo Que No Sirve Se Bota*, and *Homenaje a Las Soneras*.

As leader of *Salsa con Clase*, **Johnny Ray** is one of the few salsa artists who has maintained a steady recording career for decades. He is back with *Enredado en Tu Piel*, featuring the vocal talents of Sammy González Jr. and José Dávila.

Rafael de Jesús' 1983 album *En Grande* has been remastered and is now available, with the addition two new singles — *Tal Vez Vuelvas a Llamar-me* and *Sí No Estuvieras Tú*. A mix of "salsa sensual" with harder material, this CD's awesome lineup includes the likes of Oscar Hernández, Sal Cuevas, Barry Rogers, Yomo Toro, Papo Pepín, Marc Quiñones, Reynaldo Jorge, Mauricio Smith, Lewis Kahn, and Dick 'Taco' Mesa, among others.

In his new project (*Salsa Subterránea*) **Henry Fiol** maintains the son style that made him so popular. This recording is available only on his website...for free. That's right, you can download his CD, a promotional tactic being embraced by many artists nowadays. Hey, it is better to give it away than allowing "record pirates" to steal the CD online.

