



## SEPTEMBER 2009 ISSUE

# Columns

## LATIN UPDATE

By Nelson Rodriguez



Drummer Mark Holen's Zambomba and their CD *Three Gold Coins* covers a range of jazz and Latin rhythms such as Brazilian samba (*Three Gold Coins*), Mexican danzon (*Por Los Aires de Veracruz*), Mozambique (*Flute's the Mozambique*) and the closing track (*Swings with Some BBQ*). Reedmen Andy Drelles and Tom Murray are the featured musicians on this CD and fans of the vibes will recognize Mike Freeman's flavor on the recording.

The Cuban Masters Ensemble's *Del Pasado al Presente* (The Past Meets the Present) unites some of Cuba's finest musicians and vocalists on eleven original tunes by Aaron Singer (composer of the music) in a collaborative effort covering the various musical forms of Cuba. The list of musicians and vocalists includes Pancho Amat, Rafael Lay Bravo, Changuito,

Lazaro Galarraga, Pedro Lugo ("El Nene") Martinez, Bobby Carcasses, Enrique Pla, Emilio Morales, Ernesto Bacallao, Sixto ("El Indio") Llorente, Joaquin Pozo, Pablo Menendez, Orlando Perez Montero, Alberto "Tamayo" Gonzales, Jesus Alfonso, Dagoberto Gonzalez and many more. The closing bonus track, *Son a Celia*, written by Blas Muñoz, features the participation of La Caro Band.

Latin Beat's own DJ El Chino (from Colombia) has put together a CD from his "Europe Tour 2009-The Hits" that features selections old and new by such acts as The Conga Kings, Facundo Rivero, Belmonte, Junior Gonzalez, Mongo Santamaria, Poncho Sanchez, Orquesta Epoca, Los Blanco, Sabor a Fania and others.

From Italy comes Cromalatina (The Latin Band) and its CD, *Mi Rumba*, with a version of Tito



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Puente's *Ran Kan Kan* featuring vocals by Alejandro Jesus 'El Niño' and includes three video clips. Cromalatina have sent out a message that Italy knows its salsa and have the selections to prove it.

La Tremenda is from Scandinavia and was founded in 2002 by drummer Magnus Almqvist. In 2003 he met songwriter/arranger/keyboardist Johan Brolund who became the key man for the band's new repertoire – Cuban timba heading into a new direction.

Singer Gonzalo "Chalo" Chomat made his solo recording debut a few years back and I'm grateful to LPM (Latin Pulse Music) owner Michael Lazarus for sending me Chomat's recording *Chalo y Su Ache*. Chalo is also the featured vocalist, along with his wife Iris Sandra Cepeda, on Lazarus' new project *Team Timba*, which combines great music for both listeners and casino style (salsa rueda) dancers. Lazarus plays all the bass tracks as well as heads the entire production, co-writing the music and lyrics.

During the 1990s, Hiram Rivera was the key man in Los Angeles, showcasing Latin talent on television – the point of contact when it came to salsa and giving exposure to the various salsa labels. Today, Rivera is back with his "Salsa Showcase" airing on Time Warner Channel 36 every Wednesday night at 11 pm (PST). He is always looking for talent in the salsa, merengue and Tropical rhythm styles ([info@salsashowcase.com](mailto:info@salsashowcase.com)). You can also catch older episodes at [www.salsashowcase.com](http://www.salsashowcase.com).

One new band I truly enjoy is Sonido Criminal, led by vocalist Carlos Mojica and co-leader Willie Ramos that were known for the super hit *Urgente Olvidarte* and are presently scorching with *Rumba En El Cielo* (a tribute to the great salseros no longer with us).

By way of Georgia comes ex-Irag military serviceman Edwin Reyes y Orquesta Con Clase performing a scorching version of *Ran Kan Kan and Me Voy Pa' Bagdad* from an upcoming debut.

Soon I will be paying tribute to the ladies in the Latin music industry, as Latin Beat has noticed the incredible growth over the past few years of not only female vocalists but instrumentalists as well. One bright new spot is vocalist Mayte Perez's release *Ahora Mando Yo*, which combines a commercial side with a rougher edge that will surely garner her airplay. Her lead single *Llora, Llora* has already been huge and the follow-up title track has increased the popularity of this young lady living in Puerto Rico.

From Ukraine comes the 11-piece band Dislocados. Its debut *La Salida* packs over 70 minutes of great music. Thanks to Andy Padua for this CD that features the vocal talents of Karolina Patocki and Lesya Zdorovetskaya, featuring the blowout jam *Descarga de 44*.

Bachateros will love the new young talent (not necessarily at the commercial stations but at clubs) Freddie Muñoz and his debut *Amiga*. Listen to his sweet version of the Bee Gee hit *How Deep Is Your Love* and the merengue versions of the tracks *Amiga* and *Inocente*.



If you like salsa with a twist of Jewish fusion check out Sexteto Rodriguez, led by composer/percussionist Roberto Rodriguez and the group's CD titled *Timba Talmud*.

(Pictured Hiram Rivera (left) and Eddie Santiago (right)).



## **QUE PASA IN LA**

**By Rudy Mangual**



Autry photos by Abel Gutierrez



Under the hot California sun, the summer of 2009 in Los Angeles was again a sizzling season to be remembered with numerous concerts and music festivals pleasing the most critical of spectators. Perhaps the most anticipated event this season was the 2nd Annual Los Angeles Salsa Music Festival, which took place on Saturday, August 22 at the renowned Greek Theatre. Produced by Nederlander Concerts in association with Eddie Rodriguez & Latin Works Music, this year's event headlined the legendary Puerto Rican band El Gran Combo, Cuban superstar Willy Chirino, and salsa veteran singers Ismael Miranda and Junior Gonzalez. The full-house crowd witnessed a commendable performance by the aging superstars of El Gran Combo, which featured pianist Willie Sotero, while bandleader Rafael Ithier simply conducted the band. Willy

Chirino and his Miami based group delivered his time-tested proven hits, preceded by brief performances by Ismael Miranda and Junior Gonzalez backed by a local band under the direction of trumpeter Luis Eric Gonzalez. The latter was old-school salsa at its best.

More "Sizzling Summer Nights" were also held at the Autry National Center this summer season at Griffith Park. On August 28, the last concert of this year's summer season at the Autry National Center was hot, hot, hot, with Johnny Polanco y su Conjunto Amistad firing up the biggest night of the season. Sizzling Summer Nights is an annual all-ages dance party that features the best Latin bands in the Southland every Thursday in July and August from 6 to 9 p.m. A steady attendance of 500 to 850 people each night from all walks of life came together to party under the Los Angeles sky including salsa dancers, musicians, kids, moms and dads, and social groups. The main event sponsor, KJAZZ 88.1 FM radio handed out KJAZZ merchandise to their loyal listeners. This year's line-up included Yari Moré, Lucky 7, Orquesta Son Mayor, Perico Hernandez y Son de la Tierra, Orquesta Charangoa, Francisco Aguabella and his Latin Jazz Ensemble, Susie Hansen Latin Band, Los Compadres, and Johnny Polanco y su Conjunto Amistad. The Autry National Center at Griffith Park in Los Angeles is an intercultural history center dedicated to explore the experiences and perceptions of the diverse people of the American West.

Upcoming Events: Louie Cruz Beltran is scheduled to perform at Descanso Gardens in La Cañada on September 7th. Orquesta Opa Opa performs at Bogie's at Westlake Village on September 9th. Grammy nominated salsa sensation Jerry Rivera (directly from Puerto Rico) will be at the Conga Room on September 10th. Orquesta Borinquen (from San Francisco) performs at The Mayan in downtown on September 12th. The popular "Battle of the Bands" returns to Steven's Steak House on Sunday, September 13th, matching Angel Lebron (representing Los Angeles) versus Orquesta Borinquen (representing San Francisco).

Albert Torres Productions brings back "Salsa at The Sportsmen's Lodge" in Studio City with a grand opening on Friday, October 9th featuring Johnny Polanco y su Conjunto Amistad plus DJ Victor Rumbero and salsa dance instructor Oscar Ramirez. Please continue supporting your local artists and their venues. Peace.



## A BITE FROM THE APPLE

By Vicki Sola



One of the most spectacular recordings I've heard to date is *Kenya Revisited Live!*, with Bobby Sanabria conducting the



Manhattan School of Music Afro-Cuban Jazz Orchestra, and featuring Cándido Camero. The production, recorded live, in concert, presents new arrangements of *Kenya*, originally recorded by Machito & the Afro-Cubans, under the musical direction of

Mario Bauzá, over a half-century ago. When Sanabria visited my radio station, my listeners and I were floored by the fact that, with the exception of Sanabria and Camero - the latter now eighty-eight years old, a living legend who participated in the original recording - all of the other players are students from the Manhattan School of Music's Afro-Cuban Jazz Orchestra. On Sanabria's new version *Frenzy*, *Congo Mulence*, *Kenya*, *Holiday*, and *Blues a La Machito* are arranged by Joe Fiedler; *Oyeme and Minor Rama* by Danny Rivera; *Canonology*, *Conversation*, and *Tururato* (the latter, according to Sanabria, one of Bauzá's favorite slang expressions, meaning "dizziness" or "unsettled feeling") by Andrew Neesley; *Wild Jungle* by Michael Phillip Mossman, and *Tin Tin Deo*, arranged by Fiedler and Sanabria. *Theme and Variations on Tin Tin Deo* was composed by pianist Christian Sylvester Sands. The stunning and dynamic CD of classics performed by members of a new generation is dedicated to the memory of Machito and Mario Bauzá, and to the last surviving members who participated on their recording - Camero, Ray Santos, Pedro "Pouchie" Boulong, Santo "Sonny" Russo, and Eddie Bert. Says Sanabria, "You'll hear a new generation of players tackle this incredible music as it is re-worked with new, progressive arrangements that reflect the current state of jazz virtuosity. Rejoice as the torch is passed to these young fire breathing dragons who have dedicated their lives to America's greatest art form, jazz, and the branch of that art form that represents all of the Americas, Latin jazz." Sanabria informed me about an upcoming special, not to be missed... "Latin Music USA" premieres October 12th and 19th on PBS. The four-hour documentary, narrated by actor Jimmy Smits, traces the profound influence - deeper than most people, Hispanics and non-Hispanics alike, realize - that Latin music has had on American musical forms like rock, R&B, country, and jazz. The program also airs on Hispanic TV network V-me. Additional info is available at link [pbs.org/wgbh/latinmusicusa](http://pbs.org/wgbh/latinmusicusa).

**More laser luster...** Former New Yorker and veteran of the music scene, Robert Navarro - known for having formed Grupo Fascinacion back in 1982 - has released a "tropical jazz" production, *Caminando, Vol.1.*, featuring violinist Pedro Alfonso and percussionist Richard Bravo. Joining pianist Navarro, Bravo, and Alonso (who recently performed with Gloria Estefan), are bassists Jerry Bravo and Alex Duque, timbalero Edwin Torrez, and guitarist Rainer Marin. Tracks include classics *A Night in Tunisia*, *Watermelon Man*, *You'd Be So Nice to Come Home To*, and *All the Things You Are*, as well as the title track, composed by Navarro. Navarro's Grupo Fascinacion, which featured lead singers Johnny Rivera and Tito Gonzalez, recorded three albums. In addition to a couple of productions for Tipica 88 with vocalists Tito Gonzalez

and Jorge Maldonado, the pianist co-produced two LPs for Charanga America and produced three for Santiago Ceron. He served as musical director for Louie Ramirez's Fania production of *Onda Tipica*, with Tony Fuentes and Papy Roman, and produced the number *Dos Amigos* on José Mangual, Jr.'s *Que Lo Diga El Tiempo*. Navarro, who's arranged with and participated in piano duets with Oscar Hernandez, has worked with Eddie Palmieri, Larry Harlow, and actor Angelo Pagan, and received a Grammy Award as an arranger with Bobby Cruz for *Envidia*, from *Romanticos de Ayer, Hoy, y Siempre*. He was nominated for a Latin Grammy in 2004, for Conjunto Clasico's *The 25th Anniversary*, featuring Tito Nieves. The prolific musician has performed with a long list of notables, including Johnny Pacheco, Conjunto Classico, José Mangual, Jr., Pete "El Conde" Rodriguez, Charanga America, Angel Canales, Azuquita, Mon Rivera, Willie Colon, and the Machito Orchestra, and has toured with Celia Cruz, Ray Barretto, Frankie Ruiz, Eddie Santiago, and Santiago Ceron. In 1997, the pianist started his own production company, RNR Productions, Inc.

**DJ Jeff's "Hot Pick of the Month":** The Echo Park Project's *El Encuentro*.



By the time you read this, bandleader/conguero Luisito Rey's new CD *Lo Que Traigo Es Salsa* should be out. Co-produced by Aquelino "Junior" Zuniga, the production features lead vocalist David Millan, who as singer on Johnny Ray's *Soñando Con Puerto Rico*, received acclaim. (Pictured are Luisito Rey and Ruben Blades).

**Around town...** September 3rd marked the beginning of this year's New York City Salsa Congress. Held in midtown Manhattan's Hilton New York, live bands scheduled were Cubanason (opening evening, Sept 3rd), The New Swing Sextet (Sept. 4th), Gilberto "Pulpo" Colon, Jr. & Orchestra (Sept. 5th), and Eddie Palmieri (Sept. 6th.) ¡Hasta la proxima!



**DESDE BORINQUEN**

Por Elmer Gonzalez



**PUERTO RICO HEINEKEN JAZZFEST.** (Photos by Julio Costoso) Desde el 28 hasta el 31 de mayo se celebró la decimonovena edición del Puerto Rico Heineken JazzFest (PRHJF) en el Anfiteatro Tito Puente de San Juan. Dedicado en esta ocasión al tamborero boricua Giovanni Hidalgo, el evento más importante del jazz en la isla consistió de cuatro noches en las cuales desfilaron diversas bandas locales e importadas.

**Jueves, 28 de mayo** La apertura poderosa de la primera noche estuvo a cargo de la banda Orinoco que dirige el percusionista Pablito Rosario (antiguo acompañante de Mongo Santamará y Larry Harlow, entre otros). La segunda entrega fue el debut jazzístico del guitarrista boricua Millo Torres, quien lideró un excelente grupo denominado "Planeta Jazz".

**Viernes, 29 de mayo** La siguiente velada fue iniciada por Rebecca Cline, cuyo grupo (Enclave) arrancó aplausos entusiastas de un auditorio que pareció quedar muy satisfecho con la propuesta latina de la antedicha pianista bostoniana. La tarima se llenó luego de improvisaciones muy bien elaboradas por el trío compuesto por el baterista Jack DeJohnette, el bajista John Patitucci y el pianista Danilo Pérez. La noche cerró con el octeto de Eddie Palmieri, quien sigue siendo uno de los favoritos del público, aunque sus improvisaciones pianísticas suelen ser limitadas y repetitivas.

**Sábado, 30 de mayo** "La Timbística", – dirigida por el timbalero Marcos López y el flautista Enrique "Kalani" Trinidad, – inició el concierto del sábado. Tanto López como Trinidad son estudiantes del Berklee College of Music. Fueron "descubiertos" en los talleres puertorriqueños que la entidad universitaria con sede en Boston ha realizado en pasados años durante la semana en que se celebra el PRHJF. Más de 1600 estudiantes boricuas se han beneficiado de estos talleres y los más talentosos de ellos han recibido incentivos económicos para continuar sus estudios en Berklee. El artista gráfico y percusionista Dennis Mario presentó su propuesta, al frente del grupo Kobana Negra. Dennis Mario ha sido el artista que ha creado los anuales afiches promocionales del PRHJF, a partir del 1998. La noche cerró con un torrente de nostalgia musical generado por el grupo del guitarrista brasileño Oscar Castro-Neves, quien evocó 50 años de historia de la bossa nova a través de los temas más reconocidos de esta modalidad musical que tuvo su mejor época en la década de los sesenta.



**Domingo, 31 de mayo** El domingo en la tarde se presentó el tradicional "junte" de los profesores de los talleres "Berklee in Puerto Rico" y sus estudiantes. Fue una bella ocasión para identificar y apreciar a los jóvenes locales que comienzan a entusiasmarse con los retos presentados por el jazz. El lado latino del trombonista Conrad Herwig y su grupo constituyó un preámbulo de energía rítmica que anticipó la estelar presentación del homenajeado, Giovanni Hidalgo, y su grupo "Silver Gold". Fue entonces cuando el pianista Eric Figueroa, el bajista Eddie "Gua-Gua" Rivera y el baterista Horacio "El Negro" Hernández se enfrascaron en un "tour-de-force" percusivo que elevó el colectivo nivel de adrenalina del auditorio. Giovanni invitó a su padre, el también tamborero Manuel Hidalgo (alias "Mañengue") a "descargar" en las tumbadoras y los timbales, lo cual resultó en un duelo familiar que será recordado por muchos años venideros.

En una conferencia de prensa, Luis Álvarez (productor ejecutivo del Festival), anunció que el PRHJF del 2010 será dedicado a varios artistas que fueron homenajeados en ediciones pasadas de dicho festival.

*Prof. Elmer González/Productor: "Son del Caribe", "Son de Cuba" Radio Universidad de Puerto Rico (WRTU-FM). [gonzalezelmer@yahoo.com](mailto:gonzalezelmer@yahoo.com)*



## DESDE LA BAHIA

S.F. Bay Area

By Jesse "Chuy" Varela



**THE BUSINESS OF SALSA II:** Luis Mendoza is a mover and shaker when it comes to the business of Latin music in the Bay Area. Five years ago, he created [Ticketfiesta.com](http://Ticketfiesta.com), one of the few Latino-owned ticket outlets in the United States, and set a foundation that has established him as an entrepreneur to watch around the SF Bay. Most recently, he connected with several partners to form Montuno Productions, an organization dedicated to presenting world-class salsa on the West Coast. In the month of August he produced dance concerts with Andy Montañez and La Sonora Ponceña and in September will be presenting Luisito Ayala & Puerto Rican Power. In his mid-40s, Mendoza is drawing from his Boricua heritage for his

inspiration and sharing it with the Bay Area. Recently I sat down with Mendoza for a conversation about his activities and role in promoting and uplifting Latin music around the Bay Area and the West Coast.

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**Jesse Varela: Congratulations on the success of [Ticketfiesta.com](http://Ticketfiesta.com) and what it's doing to help promote Latin music and culture around the Bay Area. Now you are leaping forward as a promoter with Montuno Productions, what led you to promoting your own events?**

**Luis Mendoza:** Since I started [Ticketfiesta.com](http://Ticketfiesta.com) I have worked with many promoters who were putting on many different kind of shows. Slowly but surely I became interested in the promotion business as well and started contacting different bands. Having worked with other promoters I had learned the ropes and decided to try to do some shows. There are two sides to my motivation, obviously the business side and my passion for the music. Having grown up in Puerto Rico I was very lucky that at my high school parties we had great artists who performed for us like El Gran Combo, Celia Cruz, Ruben Blades, and many others. When I decided to step into promotion I came in with a plan to bring in the big names in salsa. I've had a lot of people teach me along the way from the old school but it was the legendary Julio Mercedes of Salsarengue Productions who opened the doors for me. The Orellano Brothers at Roccapulco and Julius Melendez, who is a partner in Montuno Productions, have also helped me tremendously.

**JV: I applaud you for your efforts because a few years ago we had a drought of music from Puerto Rico. It became more expensive to transport and keep up the bands as well as to pay them their requested fees. How is it now? Is there a different climate of appreciation for salsa that is making this endeavor more lucrative?**

**LM:** With the way the economy is right now it is very challenging to put on big salsa shows but I do think you can make it work, especially with the use of the Internet and all the networks out there like Facebook, Twitter and numerous websites that are very helpful. Add to that street level promotion and marketing and it can work. But it's very stressful and I can't tell you all the 16-18 hour days and sleepless nights I've had thinking about the shows I am putting on. It is tough but the reward is when the party actually begins and you are standing there watching people enjoying great music from a world-class salsa band. It gives you a great feeling of accomplishment but you also want it to work as a business and key to that is the support of the public.

**JV: The creation of [Ticketfiesta.com](http://Ticketfiesta.com) is a very important development for the Latino music industry. This is a component that has always been controlled by a few companies who sell tickets across the country for music and sporting events and who have developed a monopoly. How has it been for you entering the ticket sales arena?**

**LM:** Ticketfiesta.com has done very well from the beginning. The reason for that is the support I have gotten from major local promoters who have posted their shows on the site. That gives you credibility and once you get several big shows under your belt, like Elvis Crespo, Gilberto Santa Rosa, El Gran Combo, Daddy Yankee, and Ivy Queen, you start building a following and a database of fans who buy tickets online. Word of mouth keeps your database growing and as a result, the promoters stay with you. But it is a challenge when you try to expand to different cities because when you are not a "Ticket Master" the promoters ask who you are. That's why I'm producing shows with other promoters in other cities.

**JV: You are originally from Santurce, P.R. but left the island at 18 years of age to go to New York to seek a better life. Tell us about that decision?**

**LM:** I grew up in a tough barrio in P.R. and things were not easy. One day I told my mom I was going to NYC and bought a one-way ticket. I had no idea where I was going. I didn't have any family or friends there and after buying things that I needed for the trip I only had \$70 left. I arrived at JFK Airport November 30, 1984 and sat there thinking what Plan "B" was. I didn't know any English but in my 18-year old mind I was thinking I could get a room for \$20-\$25 and then I'd have 24 hours to make some money. It's a long story but things worked out.

**JV: They sure did. You went to Connecticut with some folks you met at the airport, got a job and eventually joined the U.S. Navy. Luis, you are truly an inspiration and I commend you for your hard work. What advice would you give to folks coming up right now about getting started in the music business?**

**LM:** Pray for your health and do your best with what you have. But if you reach a moment where you have to let it go, let it go. Don't hurt yourself or your family with fights and arguments because when things get tough people get desperate. If you reach that breaking point, start all over again.

¡Hasta la proxima! [chuyvarela@aol.com](mailto:chuyvarela@aol.com)



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