

## OCTOBER 2009 ISSUE

# Features

## FROM THE EDITOR

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In this issue of Latin Beat Magazine Volume 19, Number 8, October 2009 we feature pianist/bandleader Mark Levine as he enjoys playing the music of the late Brazilian superstar Moacir Santos. You can also enjoy our popular columns; Latin Music Update (a global look at Latin music by Nelson Rodriguez), A Bite from The Apple (the east coast Tri-State area salsa scene by Vicki Sola), Desde La Bahia (a look at the San Francisco Bay Area Latin music scene



## Streaming Music

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**Johnny Polanco y Su  
Conjunto Amistad**  
El Gusto de Mi Salsa  
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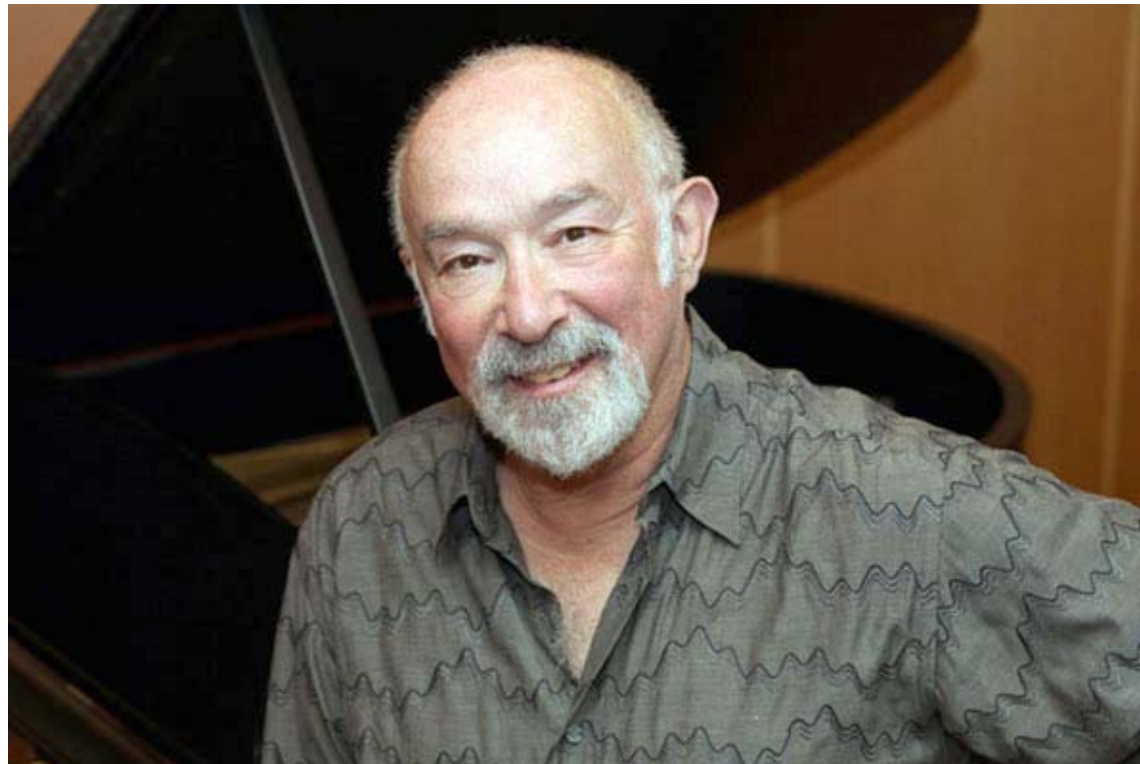


by Jesse "Chuy" Varela), Desde Borinquen (Puerto Rico's music scene by Elmer Gonzalez), and Que Pasa in L.A. (Los Angeles local Latin music and entertainment scene by yours truly Rudy Mangual), plus lots of more music and entertainment news, reviews, hit parades and music information. *Rudy Mangual*



## Mark Levine: The Music of Moacir Santos

By Mark Holston Photos by @Dave Belove



When it comes to a passion for the music of Brazilian composer Moacir Santos, Mark Levine and I go way back. By the time I met Levine in the early 1980s, when he was a member of vibraphonist Cal Tjader's group, I had collected all four of Santos' recorded-in-the-USA albums. But there was a missing link. "You have to hear this great album he did in Brazil," the pianist told me during a break at the Tjader gig, "It's amazing." Weeks later, he mailed me a cassette tape of Santos' monumental 1965 LP "Coisas", and I was stunned by the intricacy and beauty of the arrangements.

Even in the seemingly endless world of truly ingenious music penned by Brazilian composers,





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Santos stands out. That's why it was only a matter of time before Mark Levine would surrender to the call of a two-decade-long dream and produce an entire album dedicated to the late composer's artistry. The result, *Off & On - The Music of Moacir Santos* (Left Coast Clave), featuring Levine and his working group, the Latin Tinge; offers a new take on the Santos style. Whereas most Santos projects, including albums protagonized by the composer himself, have been heavily orchestrated affairs, the approach of Levine and his Latin Tinge is more free-handed and allows the dynamics of a small jazz combo to fully explore the extensive rhythmic and melodic contours of a dozen of Santos' most popular works.

Moacir José dos Santos was born in 1924 in a small town located in Brazil's arid northeastern state of Pernambuco. A saxophonist with a keen interest in composition and arranging, he studied with local teachers and played in regional groups before moving in 1948 to Rio de Janeiro, where he soon became engaged as a musician at the nightclub Brasil Danças, and in the Rádio Nacional network's in-house orchestra. He also vastly expanded his knowledge of writing and scoring as a student of two of Brazil's most famous classical musicians: composer and conductor Guerra-Peixe and pianist Hans Joachim Koellreutter. By the mid 1950s, Santos had become one of Brazil's most successful arrangers and had begun another sideline - teaching music theory to a veritable "who's who" of the emerging generation of bossa nova and post-bossa nova stars, including Sergio Mendes, Nara Leão, Flora Purim and Eumir Deodato, among many others.

Then, in 1967, when the timeless tracks of "Coisas" were still resonating among Brazil's jazz community and he had begun to score motion picture soundtracks, Santos said goodbye to his homeland and moved to Los Angeles, anticipating that greener pastures awaited. But, to fully understand the challenges he faced in relocating to another culture, imagine for a moment what would have become of Henry Mancini, Oliver Nelson or Quincy Jones if, at the same point in their careers, they had turned their back on fame at home and moved to Brazil to begin anew.

Although he produced four remarkable albums in the U.S. between 1968 and 1975, such sessions failed to establish Santos as the major talent he truly was. He languished, playing occasional gigs at obscure venues in the greater Los Angeles area. Not long after his arrival, former student Sergio Mendes extended a helping hand, employing him to play minor percussion parts on his Atlantic album "My Favorite Things".

"Moacir and I were introduced by Luis Gasca, the Mexican-American trumpet player who was touring with Mongo Santamaría at the time," Levine recalls of his first encounter with the Brazilian. "I had never even heard his music before then". The pianist began rehearsing with Santos' working group, but only performed with him on one ill-fated tour. "It was to Reno and Lake Tahoe," Levine recalls, "and it was a disaster. The Brazilian music that was popular in the USA at the time was along the lines of Brazil' 66, organist Walter Wanderley, Stan Getz, Astrud Gilberto and others doing the bossa nova style. What we played was strikingly different. One casino manager called it 'jungle music' and we were told to go home, halfway through the tour. But Moacir was a joy to work with. He was the gentlest man I've ever known. Even if he had to



criticize someone, he could make him laugh at same time".

Santos' most famous composition, *Naná*, is an infectious song that's been recorded over 150 times since the mid-1960s, and represents a starting point for understanding the rhythmically challenging and orchestrally sophisticated body of work the composer created. Other arresting Santos tunes, all included on Levine's *Off & On* include *Kathy*, *Early Morning Love*, and *April Child*. While they have yet to gain the kind of fame that such Antonio Carlos Jobim songs as *One Note Samba*, *Desafinado* and *Wave* (among dozens of others) have enjoyed for many years, Levine is resolute in his assertion that Santos is "the greatest Brazilian songwriter of the 20th Century."

"Yes, I made that statement in the liner notes of *Off & On*," he confirms. "Perhaps it would have been more accurate to say that he was the greatest unknown Brazilian songwriter. But, it's a personal choice. Moacir's music is much more rhythmically complex than the work of Jobim, Lobo, Valle, Menescal and others. The harmonies are modern jazz harmonies. His melodies are catchier. Some of the early feedback I've gotten is that people are humming the melodies along with the CD, and that's a good sign!" And Levine says that Santos' signature as a composer is fundamental. "It's the oldest criteria in the world," he states, "a unique ability to combine melody, harmony, and rhythm. I can think of only one or two musicians in his class - Hermeto Pascoal and Nguyen Le."

*Off & On* brings a decidedly Afro-Cuban interpretation to Santos' book, given the basic stylistic orientation of Levine's Latin Tinge, with Mary Fettig on sax and flute, bassist John Wiitala, trap drummer Paul van Wageningen, and Michael Spiro in the percussion chair. "Yes, there is a heavy Afro-Cuban vibe," Levine agrees. "Michael Spiro's heart is in Cuba although he is also excellent when playing Brazilian music. I handed him a simple road map of each tune, with the form and the hits, and nothing else. I knew we would head toward Havana, and we did. Of course, Michael and all of us have been familiar with Moacir's music for decades. I used arrangements from several of his Blue Note albums as a starting point. I didn't change much and just let the music go where it went. And yes, the universality of his music makes it easy to play it in different genres. The term 'world music' is much maligned, but to me he is a 'world musician' in the best sense of it."



Santos, who passed away three years ago at the age of 80, was just starting to get well-deserved attention in the last years of his life, thanks to several recording projects in Brazil dedicated to his music, including *Ouro Negro* and *Muiza Adnet Sings Moacir Santos* (both on Adventure Music). With *Off & On*, his intriguing music has yet another opportunity to gain new fans. And, given its unique Afro-Cuban treatment, Levine's experiment amounts to another success in the ongoing efforts to expand the stylistic parameters of what's known as "Latin jazz."

"To me, true Latin jazz started with Jerry González and his 1980 *Yo Ya Me Curé* recording (Sunnyside)," Levine concludes. "I played with both Mongo (Santamaría) and Willie Bobo, and as great as they were, to me, it was some Latin musicians who had a feel for jazz playing with some jazz musicians who had a feel for Latin music. I think such New Yorkers as Dafnis Prieto, Yosvany Terry, Luis Perdomo and Arturo Stable are showing one new path today. I hope that the Latin Tinge and I are showing another."



## Barranquijazz 2009

Por: Elmer González

Fotos por Eliseo Cardona



Por tercer año consecutivo, este corresponsal de LATIN BEAT MAGAZINE estuvo presente en la décimotercera edición del festival internacional de jazz denominado "Barranquijazz", realizado anualmente en Barranquilla, ciudad ubicada en la costa caribeña de Colombia. Desde el 9 hasta el 13 de septiembre, el festival presentó una muestra de varias vertientes y ramificaciones que forman parte de dicho género musical. Fui también testigo del gran empuje económico de tal ciudad, la cual parece haber evadido la crisis económica que en los pasados dos años ha afectado a muchas otras comarcas del planeta. Múltiples proyectos de construcción de viviendas, remodelaciones de calles y edificios, nuevos centros comerciales y propuestas diseñadas con miras a atraer al turismo internacional ofrecen contundente evidencia de una metamorfosis urbana en pleno progreso. Lo que parece no cambiar aún es la gran hospitalidad de los barranquilleros.



Entre las muchas atracciones ofrecidas por la ciudad natal de la cantante Shakira, suelen sobresalir su famoso carnaval (realizado en el mes de febrero) y su moderno Museo del Caribe, el cual constituye un viaje sensorial donde la tecnología se une a la creatividad humana con miras a relatar al mundo entero las riquezas culturales de la región caribeña de Colombia.

El Barranquijazz es otra de las buenas razones para visitar esta ciudad localizada en las márgenes del Río Magdalena. Al igual que en ediciones pasadas, el evento presentó en esta ocasión a artistas provenientes de diferentes latitudes que este año sumaron un total aproximado de 150 músicos representativos de diversos países de Europa y de las Américas.



La velada inaugural en el Teatro Amira de la Rosa incluyó la propuesta de jazz afrocubano del trio del pianista exiliado Osmany Paredes, la fusión de música clásica y jazz del Dúo Bozzolán de Italia, y la oferta de la banda colombiana Ábrete Jazz. La segunda noche fue un banquete para los "puristas" del jazz, engalanada con el cuarteto del afamado pianista afroestadounidense Ahmad Jamal. A éste le siguió el trombonista Papo Vázquez, respaldado por el flautista Dave Valentin y algunos músicos cubanos, cuyos conceptos de improvisación no lograron satisfacer las expectativas de algunos testigos presenciales



Durante la velada nocturna del viernes, el amplio Salón Jumbo del Country Club se llenó para escuchar a la cantante cubana Omara Portuondo. Acompañada por un quinteto, Portuondo interpretó un puñado de boleros. Más tarde, el pianista Ed Simon y el saxofonista Pablo Gil deleitaron a los presentes con un repertorio de temas venezolanos adaptados al jazz. El sábado nos deleitamos con la presencia del cantautor João Bosco y su banda, integrada por reconocidos músicos de Brasil. La velada sabatina finalizó con la banda denominada The Monterey Latin Jazz All-Stars y dirigida por el flautista cubano Orlando "Maraca" Valle, quien contó con el respaldo de Giovanni Hidalgo, "El Negro" Hernández y David Sánchez, entre otros. El cierre dominical fue una presentación gratuita realizada en una plaza pública y protagonizada por los grupos de los pianistas Emán López Nussa (de Cuba) y Samuel del Real (de Colombia). También se presentaron otros conciertos gratuitos al aire libre con artistas tales como Greg Diamond, Leonardo Donado, Rik Mol, Jaume Vilaseca y Boza, entre otros. Uno de los eventos interesantes del festival es la convocatoria que se viene haciendo por varios años para escoger bandas locales de jazz que compiten para participar del evento. De esta forma, se motiva a los músicos de la región a prepararse y a aceptar los retos implicados por idioma del jazz. Este año, la convocatoria condujo a la victoria del grupo Ábrete Jazz, caracterizado por su inusual combinación instrumental y su propuesta refrescante e interesante.



## XIII Festival de La Salsa Chimpún Callao Salsa gorda en el puerto

Por Martín Gómez

Fotos por @Omar Crispín

*Con la participación de las New York Salsa All-Stars (agrupación dirigida por Lucho Cueto), Luis "Perico" Ortíz, Ray de la Paz, Luis Enrique y la Sonora Ponceña se realizó la décimotercera edición del Festival de la Salsa Chimpún Callao.*



Aunque no tuvo la acogida de algunas otras, para los entendidos se trató de una de las mejores ediciones anuales del Festival de la Salsa Chimpún Callao. Suena contradictorio pero así fue. El complejo deportivo, con capacidad para más de 50 mil personas, apenas albergó a 15 o 20 mil personas. Cifra que no deja de ser importante, pero que ¿comparada con las que fueron alcanzadas por otras ediciones? debe haber dejado más de una preocupación en las mentes de los organizadores. ¿A qué se debería esto? Pensamos que el anuncio tan tardío de los artistas que se presentarían jugó en su contra. Y la escasa presencia de dichas estrellas en las emisoras radiales fue otro factor negativo.

### **Empezó la fiesta**

Las puertas del Complejo Deportivo Yahuar Huaca se abrieron desde las 5 p.m. y los chalacos fueron ingresando bajo estrictas medidas de seguridad. A cada persona se le daba un 'sachet' para lavarse las manos y prevenir así la presencia del virus H1N1. Y todo bien. La gente, en forma disciplinada, acató la recomendación. Uno de los encargados de encender la noche fue el sonero peruano Pablo Villanueva (alias "Melcochita"), quien interpretó clásicos de la salsa bajo un tradicional sonido cubano. Luego subió al escenario la orquesta Team Salsa, que llamó la atención tanto por la juventud de sus integrantes como por la esmerada selección del su repertorio. La voz femenina de esta agrupación se llevó los aplausos. El sonero porteño "Chaney" fue invitado en dos canciones: "El Todopoderoso" y "Todo tiene su final". Demostró mucho sabor callejero. Los minutos pasaron y eventualmente las New York Salsa All-Stars se adueñaron de la tarima. Lucho Cueto, impecablemente vestido de blanco, ordenaba sus partituras y revisaba sus ingredientes para, instantes después, soltar una descarga salsera capaz de provocar más de un tsunami en clave de rumba.

El primer sonero en salir fue el recordado Kim de los Santos, quien con su "Tomatero" nos hizo bailar nostálgicamente. La expectativa por ver al sonero que seguía desataba cierta impaciencia. Y le tocó entonces el turno a Ray de la Paz. ¿Qué decir del sonero que acompañó a Louie Ramírez en esos tremendos discos grabados a principios de los 80? Simplemente estuvo magistral. Su buen toque de elegancia, su exquisita improvisación y el intacto timbre de su voz nos hicieron pensar que estábamos ante lo mejor de la noche. Ray de la Paz interpretó



"Mentirosa", "Lluvia", "Fuerza gigante" y "La Rumba Soy Yo". El público cayó rendido.

Luego vino el momento de presentar al maestro Luis "Perico" Ortiz, el cual revivió ?dentro del marco de la banda de Lucho Cueto? el memorable "Sentimiento de un Latino". Las 20 mil personas que ya se encontraban en el recinto deben aún estar tarareando el famoso coro de esa canción. ¿Los cantantes? Nada más y nada menos que Henry Santiago y Rafael de Jesús, quienes interpretaron, en forma consecutiva, "Tin Marín" y "De Patitas". Los vientos de la orquesta, comandados por el maestro "Perico", deben haber sonado como nunca en este rincón de Sudamérica, en este lado del Pacífico sureño La nota romántica vino luego con el cantante Luis Enrique, quien visitaba de nuevo a Perú, después de muchos años de ausencia. Bastó un popurrí con sus mejores temas para que la gente pasada de treinta, especialmente las damas, comenzaran a soñar. Cierta frío en el ambiente climático se hizo notorio y todo quedó listo para el fin de fiesta con la Sonora Ponceña.



### **Los Gigantes del Sur**

Ya hemos perdido la cuenta del número de veces que la Sonora Ponceña ha visitado El Callao. Lo cierto es que la organización liderada por Papo Luca no tiene perdida en el primer Puerto del Perú. Desde el principio, cada tema fue cantado por la gente. La euforia colectiva fue desplegada en el Yahuar Huaca con "Bomba carambomba", "Yambeque", "Boranda" y "Fuego en el 23". También reinó la sorpresa con ese arreglo salsero de la colombianísima "Pollera Colorá". Héctor 'Pichie' Pérez y Danny Dávila demostraron ser reyes y señores en la vanguardia de los soneros. Para coronar la noche, el maestro Papo Luca invitó a Lucho Cueto a un contundente mano a mano pianístico. Así fue como el talento y la experiencia se dieron un abrazo de confraternidad musical en un festival que pudo aún haber tenido mejores resultados.



**Los Angeles Central Avenue Jazz Festival**  
**Jazz Notes Towered Over Central Avenue**

Text and photos @By Ricky Richardson



Thousands gathered on Central Avenue, from 42nd Street to Vernon Avenue, for the 14th Annual Central Avenue Jazz Festival. This event continues to pay homage to the rich musical culture and heritage derived from Central Avenue's 1920's-1940's jazz and blues heyday. This annual event was held on Saturday, July 25, and Sunday, July 26, from 11 A.M. to 7 P.M., right across from the historic Dunbar Hotel.

The festival got under way with a panel discussion moderated by Clara Bryant. The musical portion continued all-day long, on Saturday with the CJS Quintet, Raya Yarbrough, the Eric Reed Trio, the Adonis Puentes Band, and Bill Henderson.

On Sunday, the festival kicked off with gospel sounds provided by the Second Baptist Church's Kids Choir and continued with Jazz America, Littleton Brothers, Kalil Wilson, Kamasi Washington, the Gerald Wilson Orchestra and the Jazz on the Latin Side All-Stars.



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