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Reviews ⊕⊕⊕

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2012 ISSUE

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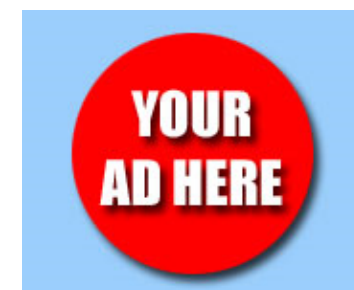
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PICK OF THE MONTH

EDDIE MONTALVO

**Desde Nueva York a Puerto Rico
(Señor Marcha Records)**

Veteran conguero Eddie Montalvo unleashes his latest recording as a leader, "Desde Nueva York a Puerto Rico" (From New York to Puerto Rico), in the company of a true "dream team" of top-caliber players and vocalists from the world of salsa. Fresh, unpredictable, and explosive arrangements pour life into a brilliant repertoire of carefully selected songs, resulting in a sound reminiscent of the "golden era" of salsa in New York City and Puerto Rico. Richly textured rhythms permeate throughout this entire recording, bringing hope and creativity to a musical movement that has been somewhat dormant for quite some time. Known in the salsa scene as "Mr. Marcha" for his rock-steady timing and heavy grooves, Montalvo has been for over four decades a "first-call" conga player in the business. Having performed, recorded, and/or toured with just about everyone in the salsa world (including Rubén Blades, Fania All-Stars, Willie Colón, Celia Cruz, Juan Luis Guerra, and Son Boricua, just to mention a few), Montalvo is featured here on quinto, conga, and tumbadora. He handpicked an amazing cast of musicians and good friends from New York and Puerto Rico to create a truly magic recording, as shown throughout the following list pianists José M. Lugo (musical director) and Papo Lucca; bassists Máximo Rodríguez and Pedro Pérez; trumpeters Jan Duclerc, Piro Rodríguez, Jesús Alonso, and Nelson Jaime (Gazú); trombonists Jorge Díaz, Reynaldo Jorge, Antonio Vázquez and Pablo Santaella; baritone saxophonists Frankie Pérez, Ernesto Sánchez and Iván Renta; timbaleros Willie Rosario and Pablo "Chino" Nuñez; bongocero Ray Colón; seguidor Jimmie Morales; and minor percussionists Héctor "Pichi" Pérez and Jeremy Montalvo.



Bloque 53

Cogelo Ahi

Windows Media

Quicktime

Chico Álvarez

El Indio Caonabo

Windows Media

Quicktime

Bio Ritmo

La Muralla

Streaming Music

Lead vocalists include Rubén Blades, Cheo Feliciano, Domingo Quiñones, Rico Walker, Tito González, Wicky Camacho, Issac Delgado, and Héctor "Pichi" Pérez

Louie Cruz Beltran
 Paint the Rhythm
Windows Media
Quicktime

While I really enjoyed all the tracks in this recording, standouts include the opener "Abicú" (a Justí Barreto composition arranged by Carlos Torres, and featuring Tito González on lead vocals), "Caonabo" (a Tite Curet Alonso composition arranged by Chino Nuñez and featuring Cheo Feliciano on lead vocals), "El Hijo del Ricachón" (another Tite Curet Alonso composition arranged by José Lugo and featuring Rubén Blades on lead vocals), and "Timba Timbero" (a Richie Viera score arranged by Papo Lucca and featuring Héctor "Pichi" Pérez on lead vocals). This is indeed one of the best salsa recordings I have heard in recent years.

—*Rudy Mangual*

Cintron Band Live
 Human Nature
Windows Media
Quicktime

Vanelis
 Como Lo Extraño
Windows Media
Quicktime

Nayibe
 Borinquen
Windows Media
Quicktime

Luis González
 Spain
Windows Media
Quicktime

Rolando Sanchez
 Vamonos De Fiesta
Windows Media
Quicktime

Steve Pouchie
 Watch Ur Wallet
Windows Media
Quicktime

Somos Son
 Bilongo

REVIEWS

SEPTETO SANTIAGUERO
Vamos Pa'La Fiesta
(Picap)

Initially established in 1995, Septeto Santiaguero is back with its seventh CD "Vamos Pa' La Fiesta," perhaps one of its best works. Throughout its 14 tracks (plus a bonus one titled "Fiesta"), Septeto Santiaguero takes us on a musical journey across Cuba's vast wealth of musical genres (son, guaracha, bolero, trova, danzón, changüí, pilón, etc.) Most of the recording was conducted by Máximo Espinosa at Santiago de Cuba's El Sótano de Amanda, El Cuarto de Tula and Estudio Siboney, but certain tracks were recorded in Puerto Rico (Fajardo's Guasábara Studio and Aguadilla's ECZ Studio), Barcelona's Vapor Studio, and several U.S. mainland locations (Gazunel Studio in Long Island, New York; Luisito Gómez Studio in Garfield, New Jersey; and Double G Music Studio in West New York, New Jersey). Non-Cuban guests on the recording include the likes of Rubén Blades, Cheo Feliciano, José Alberto (El Canario), Edwin Colón Zayas, Luisito Quintero and Jimmy Bosch, among others.



Topping the favorite tracks are the opener ("Esa Familia a Mí No Me Conviene"), "Lágrimas Negras" (featuring Rubén Blades' alter ego, "Medoro Madera," a character created by Blades to honor the traditional Cuban son vocalists), "Que Le Den Candela" (featuring Edwin Colón Zayas on the Puerto Rican cuatro guitar), "Amor Silvestre" (featuring José Alberto, alias "El Canario"), and "Un Poquito de Tu Amor" (featuring Cheo Feliciano). Praises to Septeto Santiaguero's musical director and tresero Fernando Dewar, as well as to the group's one and only horn player (trumpeter Eddy "Chuti" Lobaina), for their extraordinary work in this new recording. —*Rudy Mangual*

**Windows Media
Quicktime**

The Estrada Brothers
Mr. Ray
**Windows Media
Quicktime**

Manny Silvera
Bassed in America
**Windows Media
Quicktime**

CHEMBO CORNIEL QUINTET
Afro Blue Monk
(American Showplace Music)

In his fourth and most recent bandleading recording ("Afro Blue Monk") the veteran New York City-based percussionist Wilson "Chembo" Corniel pays homage to two pioneering musicians that helped shape the evolution of their respective musical genres — Thelonius Monk in straight-ahead jazz, and Mongo Santamaría in Latin jazz. While celebrating the 10th anniversary of his quintet, "Chaworo" — featuring Elio Villafranca (piano), Iván Renta (tenor and soprano sax), Vince Cherico (drums), and Carlo De Rosa (bass) — Corniel delivers a mixed repertoire of originals and standards showcasing his versatile command of both straight-ahead jazz and Latin idioms and his unique ability to brew a singular and distinctive interpretation of Latin jazz.



On the classic "Afro Blue" (enriched with a refreshing arrangement penned by Elio Villafranca) Chembo called on Mongo Santamaría's daughter, Ileana Santamaría to add her own Spanish-language lyrics to her father's venerable composition. Also arranged by Villafranca, Thelonius Monk's "Blue Monk" features Jimmy Owens (a Jazz Master Awards Recipient) on trumpet. Other standouts include the opener "Emiliano" and "Danzón del Invierno," authored by Villafranca and Nicki Denner, respectively. Also featured in this recording are Frank Fontaine (on clarinet and flute), and batá drummers Ogduardo Román Díaz and Diego López. —*Rudy Mangual*

MANUEL GALBÁN
Blue Cha-Cha
(Concord Picante/Montuno)

A native of Gibara, a small fishing town in Oriente (Cuba's easternmost province), the electric guitarist/keyboardist/composer /arranger Manuel Galbán (1931-2011) migrated to Havana in 1956, carrying one Cuban peso and 38 centavos in his pockets and not suspecting that he would become, about six years later, an essential element of one of the most popular Cuban groups of the 1960s —the vocal quartet Los Zafiros, whose unprecedented success was facilitated by Galbán's R&B-influenced arrangements and surf-riffed electric guitar. He applied so many guitar tonalities to Los Zafiros' hybrid sound that the legendary Cuban pianist Pedro Jústiz (better known as "Peruchín") once declared, "You would need two guitarists to replace Galbán." After Los Zafiros were dissolved in the early 1970s, Galbán remained largely ignored until the late 1990s, when he was "rediscovered" by the thoughtful producers of Buenavista Social Club.



Consisting of a CD/DVD combo, Galbán's second outing as a bandleader* —recorded a year before his demise in July of 2011— serves to establish the universal nature of Cuban popular music, particularly documenting its historical links with the Americas, Europe, and Africa. Mainly drafted at Havana's Abdala Studios, Galbán's final sessions present a mostly instrumental repertoire of originals and standards enhanced with the magical arrangements of Juan Antonio Leyva and Magda Rosa Galbán (Manuel's prodigal daughter), who never fail to provide the refreshing and modern sonorities required to smoothly combine traditional Cuban rhythms (son, mambo, bolero, chachachá, danzón, rumba, etc.) with a wide range of external but compatible idioms (jazz, blues, tango, samba, bossa nova, flamenco, Malian kora, etc.)**

In addition to the support provided by some of Cuba's top artists (vocalist Omara Portuondo, drummer/timbalero Enrique Plá, tresero Efraín Ríos, pianist Emilio Morales, bassist Frank Rubio, violinist Dagoberto González, etc.), the highly intuitive and seductive guitar icon was backed by a cast of distinguished guests from abroad, including but not limited to the sublime Bahia-born diva Rosa Passos, the enchanting vocal bossa triumvirate known as Trio Esperança, and the charming and energetic bluesman Eric Bibb, who offered the following relevant comment: "The Cubans live life completely... Of course, they can play the blues!"
—*Luis Tamargo*

*Based mostly on his creative instrumental dialogue with bluesman Ry Cooder, Galbán's bandleading debut ("Mambo Sinuendo," Nonesuch) was released in 2002.

**The arrangers' transforming multicultural skills are demonstrated throughout the entire recording, from the samba adjustment of the Piloto/Vera bolero "Y Deja" to the danzón adaptation for Argentine bandoneón of Galbán's bossa "Tierno Amanecer."

RICARDO ÁLVAREZ & CUBANÍSIMO

Marketing (Álvarez Music)

The second release of Cubanísimo —a Hamburg-based 11-piece big led by the talented pianist/composer/arranger Ricardo Álvarez— illustrates how the aforesaid Cuban bandleader has managed to innovate contemporary timba (check out the aggressive electric interventions of guitarist Danny "Labana" Martínez on three of the eleven tracks), while adapting said contemporary style to the rhythmic patterns of guaracha, guaguancó, songo, and other earlier Cuban forms. Besides Labana, Álvarez managed to recruit other magnificent guests, such as trumpeter Julio Padrón, singer Sixto "El Indio" Llorente, and drummer Giraldo Piloto, the latter of whom penned, by the way, the best couple of tunes —the son-chá "Canto a la Música Cubana" and the guaguancó-guaracha "Herencia Yoruba." The liner notes were written by Luis Tamargo, the enigmatic Latin Beat editor rumored to be residing in close proximity to an Amerindian reservation located in the midst of the Mohave Desert.

—*Ernesto Jaúregui*



JOSÉ LUGO & GUASÁBARA COMBO
Poetic Justice
(En Grande Music)

The Puerto Rico-based pianist/keyboardist/bandleader/arranger José M. Lugo brings us his latest release, "Poetic Justice" accompanied by his powerhouse band, known as Guasábara.

Perhaps best known for his work with the singing salsa superstar Gilberto Santa Rosa, José Lugo is currently one of the top international exponents of the salsa idiom, and his band is always guaranteed to produce solid, tasteful, dance-friendly salsa. Brilliant arrangements are constantly applied throughout this production, which is packed with exciting solos and power jams. Fronting Guasábara on lead vocals is José "Pepito" Gómez, who holds his own in the company of this amazing octet, additionally comprised of Jan Duclerc (trumpet), Rolando Alejandro (flugelhorn), Frankie Pérez (tenor saxophone), Jorge Rodriguez (bass), Pablo Padin and Raúl Rodriguez (percussions).



Such central elements are reinforced on this recording by Ángel "Pito" Pérez (guitars), Luis R. Lugo (timbal), and Bernie Pérez (minor percussion), plus background vocals supplied by Jerry Medina, Wicky Camacho and Gino Meléndez, among others. Highlighting this recording are the selections "Alguien Que Me Quiera," "Parece Que Uno Se Va a Morir," and the instrumental "Postum Mambo." —*Rudy Mangual*

DONALD VEGA
Spiritual Nature
(Resonance)

Like many other young Nicaraguans, the classically trained pianist/keyboardist/composer/arranger Donald Vega fled his native country in the late 1980s to avoid being drafted by the totalitarian Sandinista regime in a fratricidal war launched against its political adversaries, labeled as "Contras." Like many other Nicaraguan refugees, the 14 year-old musical prodigy settled in Southern California, where he was mentored by such Latin jazz legends as Al McKibbon and Francisco Aguabella.



Backed by a cast of extraordinary L.A.-based players —bassist Christian McBride, drummer Lewis Nash, guitarist Anthony Wilson, violinist Christian Howes, etc.- Vega makes a formidable leap as composer and arranger on his second bandleading expedition*, exhibiting mostly his graceful fluidness and opulent touch as a mainstream jazz pianist, while changing gears from trio to quartet to quintet formats, and carefully combining his preeminent jazz chops with classical and Latin influences, as illustrated in the delicately

suggestive bossa vibe applied to Monty Alexander's "The River" or the skillful incorporation of the 6/8 Cuban tumbao to his cosmopolitan adaptation of "Etude Opus B, #2," a classical piece authored by Alexander Scriabin. Which explains why the legendary Ron Carter, Vega's current employer, has offered the following comment: "There is always a concern in the jazz community as to where and who will be the next piano voice. After listening to a pre-release CD, I've found him... Mr. Donald Vega!" —*Luis Tamargo*

- His self-produced debut, a trio date titled "Tomorrows", was released in 2008

RICHIE ZELLÓN

Beatles: An Afro Peruvian Jazz Tribute (Song-o-sau'rus Records)

Based in South Florida, the Peruvian guitarist/bandleader Richie Zellón has released his first U.S. recording in nearly a decade —"Beatles: An Afro Peruvian Jazz Tribute" pays homage to the music of Lennon, McCartney and Harrison, hereby fused by Zellón with Afro-Peruvian rhythms and modalities. In addition to the nine Beatles compositions, the CD also includes the selection titled "Serenata en Landó," a piece scored by Zellón and dedicated to the late renowned Afro-Peruvian guitarist/composer Félix Casaverde, who accompanied Zellón on his 1981 debut recording "Landó-logía". On this homage to the Beatles (recorded in Lima and Miami), Zellón is joined by a couple of Grammy Award winners (violinist Federico Britos and saxophonist Ed Calle), plus Cuban classical and jazz guitarist Enrique Gardano, Peruvian percussionists Alfredo Valiente and Cesar Ballumbrosio, drummer Sammy Fonseca and bassoonist Jorge Morera. The chosen Beatles classics include the opening "Blackbird" (delivered in the rhythm of festejo), "Tomorrow Never Knows" (performed as a marinera, Peru's national dance), "Can't Buy Me Love" (panalivio-rock), "And I love Her" and "Michelle" (both adapted to the landó idiom), among others. I must congratulate Zellón for his visionary approach to this truly experimental and special project. —*Rudy Mangual*



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