



DECEMBER 2009 ISSUE

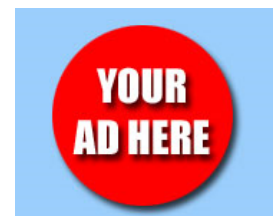
Reviews ⊕⊕⊕

PICK OF THE MONTH

RUBÉN BLADES

Cantares del Subdesarrollo
(Rubén Blades Productions)

Panamanian salsa superstar/actor Rubén Blades is back on the airwaves and the international music charts with his latest production, *Cantares del Subdesarrollo* (Songs of Underdevelopment). After serving as Panama's Minister of Tourism for the past five years, Blades returns to his music, continuing a saga he initiated in 1969 that introduced the public to his many socio-political characters, including Pedro Navaja, Juan Pachanga, La Chica Plástica, Pablo Pueblo, and Madame Kalalú, among others found in his masterpiece work, *Maestra Vida*. This new recording is a collection of songs that Blades started recording on his own in 2003, which finally materialized into a full-fledged production in 2009. Basically a one-man show, Blades plays the acoustic guitar, the Cuban tres, bongó, maracas, and cencerro, and sings all the lead vocals and choruses. Walter Flores gives Blades a hand, laying the bass tracks, flute and minor percussions, and also serves as the recording engineer, mixing and mastering the whole production. The conga tracks throughout are samples from recordings by Marc Quiñones, Oscar Cruz and Rey Cruz. All of the tracks are original scores recorded and brought to life in Blades' home garage in Los Angeles, California. The simplicity and raw nature of the chosen material amplify the true message of each composition, while enunciating the real beauty, power and flavor of its rhythms. Blades excels as a composer, and singer, displaying numerous vocal sounds and styles throughout this recording, and even changes his voice to develop the characters and fit any given song. He spiritually dedicates the production to the island of Puerto Rico, and musically dedicates it to Cuba for its original musical gift to the world. Topping my list of favorite tracks are the opener *Las Calles*, *El Tartamudo*, *Olaya*, *Segunda Mitad del Noveno* (the best rumba of the year), and *Simbolo*. – Rudy Mangual



Streaming Music

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Manny Silvera

Bassed in America

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Bobby Matos

Cuchy Frito Man

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Chembo Corniel

Buena Gente

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Maña

Tranquilito

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[Quicktime](#)

Santiago Ceron

Besos de Hada

[Windows Media](#)

[Quicktime](#)

Johnny Polanco y Su Conjunto Amistad

El Gusto de Mi Salsa

[Windows Media](#)

[Quicktime](#)

Siempre Salsa All Stars

Salsa Para Siempre

[Windows Media](#)

[Quicktime](#)

REVIEWS

ANIBAL D'GRACIA & BATUKEALO

Que Siga La Fiesta!!!
(Batukealo Records)

Hailing from Bayamón, Puerto Rico, Batukealo is a dance-party band that blends the traditional rhythms of Puerto Rico and the Caribbean with Brazilian batucada, creating a unique rhythmic sound. Led by trombonist Anibal D'Gracia, this latest offering by Batukealo contains 13 tracks of refreshing selections from the dance genres of salsa, plena, merengue and batucada, guaranteed to ignite any party. The production features Giovanni Lugo and Henry Santiago on lead vocals, with choruses provided by Sammy Vélez, Luisito Carrión, Pedro Brull and Manuel Collazo. Guest musicians include Christian Nieves (cuatro), Luis Oscar Rios (tres), Kalani Trinidad (flute), and Juan Castillo (accordion), plus guest vocalists Carlos M. Avilés, Michelle Sotomayor, and Víctor Muñiz. Standouts include the opening tune *A Ti Na' Má*, *Medley de Comparsas y Plenas*, and *El Ron es mi Medicina*. The closing track, *Ritmo de Plena*, is an instrumental recording for those listeners who want to play along or dance to the rhythm of plena. A bonus video track for-computers-only (*Medley de Comparsas y Plenas de P.R.*) completes this amazing new recording, just in time for the holiday season. – Rudy Mangual



CHARANGA CUBANA

Hasta Afuera
(Dímelo Records)

The brainchild of Cuban bassist/composer/arranger/ bandleader Edgar Hernández (who has called Los Angeles home for almost a decade), Charanga Cubana is the keeper of all-things-Cuban in Southern California. This latest production, titled *Hasta Afuera*, is



the follow-up to the band's 2008 Grammy-nominated *A Comer Chicharrón* release. Continuing their journey in the path of traditional Cuban music with a progressive edge, Hernández and his *charangueros* deliver a balanced repertoire of mostly original scores (penned and arranged by Hernández) and a few classic tracks, all reflecting the unique flavor and sound of this astonishing band. Fronting the charanga are lead singers Antonio "Tony" Alba, Iris Sandra Cepeda and Alberto Tamayo. Additionally, featured guest vocalists include Chino Espinoza and Martín Padilla. Highlighting this session are the selections *Hasta Afuera*, *Qué Casualidad la de Margarita*, and *Descarga Dimelo*. – Rudy Mangual



PAQUITO HECHAVARRÍA

Frankly (Calle 54)

Most Latin Beat readers have probably heard Paquito Hechavarría's killer tumbao, particularly as documented on the Miami Sound Machine's breakthrough hit *Conga* (1985), when Cuban Miami's best-kept musical secret made Gloria Estefan famous. Nevertheless, the Matanzas-born, 70 year-old exiled pianist spent many years in relative obscurity, and it appears that his previous bandleading sessions* failed to capture the true nature of his elegant pianistic potency. The opposite happens in his first Calle 54 outing (recorded in New York, in December 2007) whose repertoire is comprised of some of the greatest North American standards, collectively injected with a delightful Cuban jazz groove (check out, for example, Hechavarría's rumba adaptation of *Love is A Many Splendored Thing*). Or, as liner notes writer Ned Sublette explains it: "This is Cuban jazz, and it's no less Cuban because they're playing *Fly Me to the Moon*. The Cubans changed the way jazz was played in the U.S., even while they were finding a way to turn their enthusiasm for jazz into their own way of enriching it." Equally influenced by Art Tatum and Peruchín, Hechavarría fronts an entirely efficient and effective rhythm section (acoustic bassist Andy González, trap drummer Dafnis Prieto, and percussionist Pedro Martínez), properly complimented by a couple of bona-fide "Cubanized" jazz soloists – trumpeter Bryan Lynch and altoist Phil Woods. Congratulations to Calle 54 producer Nat Chediak for finally doing justice to an unfairly forgotten Cuban piano legend. – Luis Tamargo



*I am referring to *Piano Sentimental* (Bluebell, 1965), *Piano Alegre* (Discolor, 1980) and *Piano* (Sony, 1995), the latter of whom was properly defined by Nat Chediak as "an album of salsa disguised as Latin jazz"

HENRY BRUN & THE LATIN PLAYERZ

Rhythms and Reeds...A Tribute to the Master Duke Ellington (Pulsar Records)

The San Antonio-based percussionist/bandleader/radio DJ Henry Brun pays tribute to the music of jazz great Duke Ellington on this new recording, revealing the talents of his Latin Playerz: Travis Davis (piano), Rafael Petición (bass), Gabriel Pintor (saxophones) and Judi de León (vocals), under the musical direction of trumpeter Adrián Ruiz. Brun takes the music of Duke Ellington to the Latin jazz arena, highlighting the saxophone as the main instrument on all the melodies, with a basic Latin rhythm section in the background. Heading the list of invited reed players in this recording is Justo Almario, followed by Dr. John Mills, Philippe Vieux, and Vernon "Spot" Barnett. Additional rhythm players include drummer Mike Koenning and percussionist René González, among others. Favorite tracks include the selections *Upper Manhattan Medical Group*, *It Don't Mean a Thing (If it Ain't Got That Swing)*, and *Muñeca* (Satin Doll). – Rudy Mangual



CHARLIE SIERRA Y SU ORQUESTA PASO NIVEL

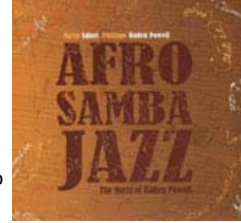
Ganas De Bailar (Paso Nivel Records)

Established in 2006 in Vega Baja, Puerto Rico, by seasoned percussionist Charlie Sierra, Orquesta Paso Nivel showcases an interesting mix of veterans with young, up-and-coming musicians, all infused with the same goal of creating the best possible music for their listening and dancing audiences. With arrangements supplied by Luis "Périco" Ortiz, Louis García, Ramón Sánchez, and Eric Figueroa, Orquesta Paso Nivel's debut presents an entirely festive repertoire of salsa dura scores and romantic ballads, capable of pleasing the most critical salsa dancers. Efraín "Pichi" Gaetán and Héctor "Tito" Pérez are the featured vocalists, with the additional participation of guest singers Andy Montañez, Cheo Feliciano and Ismael Miranda, as well as a rare presentation of Gilberto Santa Rosa, playing the bongó on the selection *Yo Bailo de Todo*. Other standouts include the tracks *Ganas de Bailar y Tocar*, *Busco una Chica*, and *Eso es Mio*. – Rudy Mangual



MARIO ADNET & PHILIPPE BADEN POWELL
Afrosambajazz–The Music of Baden Powell
(Adventure Music)

This musical homage to Baden Powell highlights multiple compositional jems elaborated (partly or solely) by the influential and masterful Brazilian guitarist from the mid-1960s to early 1980s and often known as "Afro-sambas" (sambas enriched with other Afro-Brazilian elements). Coproduced and arranged by guitarist Mario Adnet (known for his prior role as coproducer of the acclaimed Moacir Santos collection titled *Ouro Negro*) and pianist Philippe Baden Powell (prodigal son of the abovementioned mulatto legend of Rio's bossa movement), the CD *Afrosambajazz** offers new arrangements of Baden Powell's beautiful songbook, including various melodic tributes to the Afro-Brazilian orixás coauthored by the prodigious Vinícius de Moraes (1913-1980), a son of Xangó who jokingly referred to himself as "the blackest white man in Brazil." – *Luis Tamargo*



* The title is obviously derived from Baden Powell's landmark 1966 collaboration with Vinícius de Moraes - the classic LP *Os Afro Sambas* (Barclay).

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