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Features ⊕⊕⊕

DECEMBER 2011/JANUARY 2012 ISSUE

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FROM THE EDITOR

This Volume 21, Number 10, December/January 2012 issue marks the completion of 21 years of publishing Latin Beat Magazine (19 years in print and 2 years 100% online). Our annual "Top Ten CDs of the Year" - selected by Latin Beat contributors - kicks off this issue. This December/January issue also features more profiles on some of the top percussionists from the world of Latin, jazz, and world music.

Our good friend, actor/activist Ismael "East" Carlo represented Latin Beat Magazine at this year's annual "Festival del Cuatro" held at Azusa Pacific University here on the West Coast, providing readers with his observations and a spectacular pictorial of the event. The national popularity of this event has generated hundreds of inquiries to our offices about the possibility of extending this cultural event to other communities outside of California. For those of you interested, please contact Roberto Rivera (President of The Festival del Cuatro organization) by visiting www.festivaldelcuatro.org.

Louie Cruz Beltran
Paint the Rhythm
Windows Media
Quicktime

Cintron Band Live
Human Nature
Windows Media
Quicktime

Vanelis
Como Lo Extraño

This month check out our popular columns (Que Pasa in L.A., A Bite from the Apple, Desde Borinquen and Latin Beat Music Update), our national and international hit parades, CD reviews, music news, and much more.

Our wish at Latin Beat Magazine Online is for our readers to experience a safe and joyful holiday season in the company of their loved ones. ¡Feliz Navidad y un Prospero Año Nuevo!
Rudy & Yvette Mangual



**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
**Windows Media
Quicktime**

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

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

Bobby Matos
Cuchy Frito Man



By Vicki Solá

1. Boricua Legends "Diciendo Presente" (Freddy Promotions)
2. Dave Valentín "Pure Imagination" (High Note Records)
3. Choco Orta "Choco Swing" (Chocolocochochon Bolsillo Productions)
4. Grupo Gale "Deluxe" (Codiscos)
5. Henry Fiol "Salsa Subterránea" (Corazon Records)
6. Frankie Morales "No Te Equivoques... Es Frankie Morales" (Vargas Music Productions)
7. Steven Kroon "Without a Doubt (Sin Duda)" (Kroonatune Records)
8. Carlos Jiménez Mambo Dulcet "Red Tailed Hawk" (CJ Martinete Music)
9. Ocho y Más "Que Mas" (Q&A Productions)
10. Hector Ivan Rivera "Espiritu de Barrio" (Bronco)

By Rebecca Burkeen

1. Mana "Drama y Luz" (Chamán Music)
2. Prince Royce "Prince Royce" (TSM)
3. Sergent Garcia "Una y Otra Vez" (Cumbancha)
4. Choca Orta "Choco Swing" (Chocolocochochon Bolsillo Productions)
5. Miguel Zenón "Alma Adentro" (Marsalis Music)
6. Various Artists "Miles Español" (eOne Music)
7. John Santos Sextet "Filosofía Caribeña Vol.1" (Machete Music)



**Windows Media
Quicktime**

8. Santiago All Stars "Joyas y Rareza" (JHH)
9. Lucky 7 Mambo "Chapter 1" (Independent)
10. Candi Sosa y Victor Cegarra "Guarapo" (Independent)

**Chembo Corniel
Buena Gente
Windows Media
Quicktime**

By Rudy Mangual

1. Various Artists "Miles Español" (eOne Music)
2. Carlos Cascante y su Tumbao "Hablando en Serio" (Bettr Musik)
3. Maraca and his Latin Jazz All Stars "Reencuentros" (Descarga Sari)
4. Jerry González "Jerry González y El Comando de la Clave" (Sunnyside)
5. Michel Camilo "Mano a Mano" (Decca/Universal)
6. Stefan Harris/ David Sanchez/ Christian Scott "Ninety Miles" (Concord Picante)
7. La Sucursal S.A. "Sin Fronteras" (La Trifulca)
8. 8 Y Más "Que Mas" (Q & A Productions)
9. Lucky 7 Mambo "Chapter 1" (Independent)
10. Santiago All Stars "Goya y Rareza" (JHH)

**Maña
Tranquilito
Windows Media
Quicktime**

By Nelson Rodriguez

1. Jose Rizo's Mongorama "Mongorama" (Saungu)
2. Mambo Legend Orchestra "Watch Out -Ten Cuidado" (MLO)
3. Lucky 7 Mambo "Chapter 1" (Independent)
4. Alex Wilson Presents Salsa Veritas "Ready For Dancers" (Salsa Veritas)
5. Grupo Salsafon "Tribute To The Barrio" (Independent)
6. Bobby Sanabria & The Manhattan School of Music Afro Cuban Jazz Orchestra "Tito Puente Masterworks Live" (Jazzheads)
7. Bloque 53 "Te Hace Mover Los Pies" (Independent)
8. Montuno Swing "Rico Tumbao" (independent)
9. Santiago All Stars "Joya Y Rareza" (JHH)
10. Sonido Criminal "Crime Payz" (CMJr)

By Elmer Gonzalez

1. Miguel Zenón " Alma Adentro" (Marsalis Music)
2. Maraca and his Latin Jazz All Stars "Reencuentros" (Descarga SARL)
3. Grupo Abatal "Soneros En La Plena" (Atabal De P.R).
4. Various Artists "Sonó, Sonó... Tite Curet" (Popular Inc.)
5. Various Artists " Miles Español" (eOne Music)
6. Jerry Gonzalez "Jerry Gonzalez y Los Comando de la Clave" (Warner Music)
7. Mongorama " Mongorama" (Saungú)
8. Grupo Esencia "Con La Fuerza De Un Tren" (Independent)
9. Poncho Sanchez/Terence Blanchard "Chano Y Dizzy" (Concord Jazz)
10. Charlie Sepúlveda "After Hours" (Camellia Sessions)

By Luis Tamargo

1. Maraca and his Latin Jazz All-Stars: "Reencuentros" (Descarga)
2. Michael Camilo: "Mano a Mano" (EmArcy)
3. Jane Bunnett & Hllario Durán: "Cuban Rhapsody" (Alma)
4. Yorgis Goiricelaya: "Elegance" (Yorgismusic)



5. Eliane Elias: "Light My Life" (Concord Picante)
6. Harold López Nussa: "El Pais de las Maravillas" (World Village)
7. Carlos Varela: "All His Greatest Hits" (Graffiti)
8. José Rizo's Mongorama: "Mongorama" (Saungú)
9. Claudio Roditi: "Bons Amigos" (Resonance)
10. Sammy Figueroa and his Latin Explosion: "Urban Nature" (Nañire)

By Guido Herrera

1. Mambo Legends Orchestra "Watch Out! / Ten Cuidado!" (Zoho)
2. Maraca and his Latin Jazz All Stars "Reencuentros" (Descarga SARL)
3. Arturo O'Farrill and The Afro Latin Orchestra "40 Acres and a Burro" (Zoho)
4. Bobby Sanabria & The Manhattan School of Music Afro-Cuban Jazz Orchestra "Tito Puente Masterworks Live!!!" (Jazzheads)
5. Cachao "The Last Mambo" (Eventus)
6. Jane Bunnett & Hilario Duran "Cuban Rhapsody" (Alma Records)
7. Michel Camilo "Mano a Mano" (Universal)
8. Willy Torres "Hardcore" (Latin Street Music)
9. Jerry Gonzalez "Jerry Gonzalez y Los Comandos de la Clave" (Sunnyside)
10. Miguel Zenón "Alma Adentro" (Marsalis Music)

By Ernesto "Chico" Alvarez

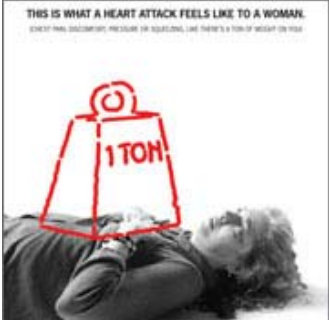
1. Various Artists "Africa Caribe" (Produced and Mixed by Joaquin Claussell)
2. Juan Wust "I Remember You" (Independent)
3. Stefon Harris/David Sanchez/Christian Scott "Ninety Miles" (Concord Picante)
4. Randy Brecker with DR Big Band "The Jazz Ballad Song Book" (Independent)
5. The John Santos Sextet "Filosofía Caribeña, Vol. 1" (Machete Records)
6. Etienne Charles "Kaiso" (Independent)
7. Mark Weinstein "El Cumbamchero" (Jazzheads)
8. Steve Kroon "Without A Doubt" (Kroontune Records)
9. Candi Sosa & Victor Cegarra "Guarapo" (Independent)
10. Lucky 7 Mambo "Chapter 1" (Independent)




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BEAT MAKERS

By Rudy Mangual

Louie Cruz Beltran



Los Angeles-based bandleader/percussionist/vocalist Louie Cruz Beltran has been banging on drums since he was in grade school. The early recordings of Ray Barretto, Mongo Santamaría, and Pérez Prado initially captivated him and inspired him to play percussion instruments. Beltran said, "I was born to play conga drums. I am a rumbero." Beltran studied music at the Bakersfield City College but his first Latin percussion instructor was Jorge Claudio (a Puerto Rican percussionist who introduced Beltran to the fundamental rhythms of Cuba and Puerto Rico). Later on, he was mentored by Coke Escovedo, who encouraged him to pursue his goals as a musician. Beltran formed his first band "Sangre del Sol" in the mid-1970s, performing music inspired by Santana, Azteca, Roberto Roena, Tito Puente, and Mongo Santamaría.

In 1978, he joined the group "Starrfire" and toured throughout the United States, Europe, the Middle East and Africa. A year later, Beltran was in the studio with "The Sylvers," recording the hits "Boogie Fever" and "Hot Line". During the 1980s, after trying his luck with some acting roles in Hollywood, he hit the road again touring with "Luis Godoy Mejia and Mancotal" (a nuevo canto salsa project). He then worked with international entertainer Ray Camacho, followed by a tour with the reggae band "O.P. Stylee." Beltran also worked with Laura and Paul Satterfield, Monty Byrom and Rita Coolidge. Since the mid-1990s, he has been leading his own band fusing Latin rhythms with jazz, R&B, rock and Brazilian modalities.

In 2001 Louie Cruz Beltran released his debut CD as a leader titled "It's My Time" - produced by Peter Michael Escovedo - to rave reviews. Having followed Beltran's career throughout the last decade in Los Angeles I have observed a multi-talented artist 100% dedicated to his music. He's an excellent timbalero but even better behind the conga drums. Currently enjoying the release of his latest CD recording "Paint the Rhythm," which is an outstanding production, Beltran shines as a bandleader, composer, lead vocalist and seasoned percussionist.

Carlos "GoGo" Gómez



Percussionist/educator/martial arts expert/ santería priest Carlos "Go Go" Gómez was born and raised in the Bronx, New York to Puerto Rican and Cuban parents. By the age of 16, he became a founding member of the Latin rock group "Seguida." After graduating from City College of New York, where he majored in ethnomusicology, Gómez relocated to California in the late 1970s. For two decades, Gómez played jazz with Bobby Hutcherson, John Handy, Rodney Franklin, Babatunde Lea, Jules Broussard and Manhattan Transfer, while performing with various salsa and Latin jazz bands, including Pete and Coke Escovedo, Sheila E. and Conjunto Céspedes. He also played world music with O.J. Ekemode, The Nigerian All-Stars, and Batucaje Brazilian Dance Troupe, among others. Gómez toured with the group ConFunkShun, as well as with Laura Branigan, for many years. Also topping his résumé are performances with Tito Puente, José Feliciano, Pharaoh Sanders, Arturo Sandoval, Grupo Afro-Cuba de Matanzas, Mariah Carey and Sadé.

Gómez always balanced his fast-paced musical career by honing his martial arts skills, as well as immersing himself in the study of traditional African and Eastern religions. He studied percussion in Cuba's University of Matanzas and Instituto Folklórico Nacional. Gómez established the first program of studies in Afro-Cuban song, drum and dance at the College of the Redwoods in Eureka, California. Most recently, he taught at Queens College of the City University of New York.

In 2005, he released his debut solo album titled "Homenaje al Asmático", and this year he released his sophomore production, "New Paradigm Global Music" (featuring electronic and

acoustic world trance grooves).

Henry Brún



Born in the Bronx and currently based in San Antonio, Texas, Henry Brún first played congas at age seven. Four years later, his family moved to Puerto Rico, where Brún began his musical studies in Ponce at the Escuela Libre de Música Juan Morel Campos. In 1974, he performed his first professional engagement with the popular Latin pop group led by Danny Cruz. Brún continued his music studies under the guidance of pianist-composer Eduardo Flores Mattei. Brún's drumming expertise includes tumbadoras, bongó, timbal, and various percussion instruments of Africa, Brazil and the Middle East.

Brún has performed on more than 678 recordings, including numerous Grammy-winning and Gold and Platinum albums. He also performed in the Univisión-produced video "Raza de Campeones," BET Network's Jazz Central, and the BBC documentary "Texas Saturday Night."

In 1989, Brún formed the popular group called "The Latin Playerz" and noted for its blend of Latin, R&B, swing, and straight-ahead jazz. The Latin Playerz have achieved notoriety for successfully adapting to a variety of performing venues without compromising its high artistic standards. The group has appeared at numerous festival activities throughout the U.S. and abroad, including Cuba's Festival Internacional del Caribe, Puerto Rico's Heineken Jazz Festival,

México's Festival International de Jazz, Houston International Jazz Festival, Taichung International Jazz Festival, and Kaohsiung Zuoying Wannian Folklore Festival.

His professional discipline and dedication to musical excellence have earned Brún (also renowned as a committed educator and active clinician) the opportunity to tour and record with such artists as Arturo Sandoval, Justo Almario, Charo, Los Lobos and Little Joe & La Familia.

Michito Sánchez



The Nevada-based bandleader/percussionist Michito Sánchez is currently a regular sub on the show "Lion King" in Las Vegas and performs with contemporary icons Marcus Miller, Arturo Sandoval, and James Taylor, among others.

The Michito Sánchez Salsa Orchestra, on the other hand, has a short but impressive history. Sánchez was approached in 2007 by John Collision (Entertainment Director of the South Point Casino), who asked him to create a Latin band that would break the norm in Las Vegas. A visionary who never declines a musical challenge, Sánchez accepted Collision's proposal. Pulling from his experience as a freelance studio musician in Los Angeles for over 20 years, Sánchez scouted the best talent in Las Vegas and rehearsed them like they had never been rehearsed before.

"We can be individually great, but if we can't listen and play together, we are nothing," was his motto. Its debut was made in July of 2007. Today, the band still holds the local record for most paying attendees in one night, upon gathering an audience of 973 on July 3, 2008. For this reason, it is easy to understand why the Michito Sánchez Salsa Orchestra was the longest running act on the South Point roster since the conception of the showroom in 2007. In May of 2008, Arman Bolidian (President and CEO of Westbound Records) coincidentally happened to be staying at the South Point Hotel and saw the band. Bolidian was so impressed that two months later, Sánchez signed his first record deal with Westbound Records. In June 2008, the Michito Sánchez Salsa Orchestra was selected as "Best Salsa Performer" in the First Annual Las Vegas Latin Music Awards, proving that the band has a world-class sound and attitude. And two years later, Sánchez (along with his longtime partner Ron Cabrildo, CEO of Definitive Talents) moved their successful "Salsero Nights" show to the Las Vegas Strip, debuting at the world famous Tropicana Hotel & Casino in September 2010. Las Vegas and the global salsa community anxiously await the release of Michito Sánchez's first bandleading CD, "Atención," on Westbound Records.

Edgardo Cintrón



Percussionist Edgardo Cintrón is a second-generation Puerto Rican and a second-generation musician, known as much for his affable personality and generous spirit as for his tasty musicianship. Cintrón was born on August 28, 1958, in Fort Riley, Kansas, and he attributes his primordial musical influences to his father, Pablo, who played guitar in a U.S. military band, although he was also influenced by Charlie Parker, Stevie Wonder, Carlos Santana, and Tito Puente. By the age of five and under his father's direction, Edgardo was already studying French horn, guitar, and percussion.

After the family moved to the East Coast in 1962, the elder Cintrón formed his own band, Los Tropicales. By the age of twelve, Edgardo Cintrón held the percussion chair. He traveled up and down the coast with that band, playing at hotels and Latin dances, while working with such notable musicians as Yomo Toro and Maso Rivera.

"We used to wear the ruffled shirts, the red suits and got the people dancing," says Edgardo. "We played all the great Latin standards." After serving in the army (1975-1977), Edgardo began studying music again. In 1988, he formed his own 12-piece band, Tiempo Noventa Orchestra. They went on to perform in numerous jazz festivities, including the Bethlehem Music Festival, Newark Jazz Festival, Clifford Brown Jazz Festival, and Cape May Jazz Festival.

In 1995, Edgardo released his self-produced debut CD, "Musica Caliente." It was followed by two other CDs for the DBK label. Currently, Cintrón fronts the Latin-pop orchestra "Cintrón", which lends its name to promote a new East Coast popular power drink under the banner of "Cintrón Beverages." Their latest recording, "Cintrón Live Manteca" has gained much acclaim.



Rhythms of My Soul, Part II

By Edgardo Cintrón

Rafael De Los Reyes



Rafael de los Reyes was born in 1958 in New York City, in the district of Manhattan known as Hell's Kitchen. As child, all he would hear around the house was music, and rightfully so. Rafael was raised in a musical environment, being the son of Cuban bandleader Emilio Reyes and Puerto Rican vocalist Irma Rodríguez. On the paternal side, he hails from a very musical family, which includes his cousins, the legendary drummer and percussionist Walfredo de los Reyes Sr. (Fajardo, Cachao, Wayne Newton), and his percussive offspring — Walfredo Reyes Jr. (Santana, Steve Winwood, Lindsay Buckingham) and Daniel "Danny" de los Reyes (Yanni, Earth, Wind and Fire, Jennifer López). By the age of six, Rafael was already performing as percussionist and singer. His early musical experiences occurred while he was featured as a percussionist in his father's band playing gigs around the N.Y. metropolitan area and recording with local groups. By the time he reached his adolescence, he had acquired the knowledge of a

seasoned professional.

When Rafael turned 14, he began studying formally with William Kessler, before moving to the Drummer's Collective during the 1970s. He furthered his studies with Henry Alder (and later with Sam Ulano), but briefly interrupted his musical career to serve with his country's true military elite unit — the United States Army's Special Forces. After his tour of duty was over, Rafael picked up right where he had left off, maintaining a regular work schedule within the nightclub circuit, in some of New York City's major clubs, as well as a number of off-Broadway theaters. He initially played the drum set, but soon became an accomplished conga drummer and mastered other hand percussion instruments.

Throughout the years, de los Reyes has performed with numerous artists, including Bo Diddley, The Shirelles, The Drifters, The Platters, The Marvelettes, The Tokens, Mary Wells, Ben Vereen, Ben E. King, Joey Dee & the Starlighters, The Shangri-Las, Celia Cruz, La Lupe, Orlando Contreras, Vicentico Valdés, Lou Pérez, and Chico Alvarez. His talents have also been exhibited on television performances (including the 1999 Grammy Awards show, "One Life to Live"). He is currently working on a Jimi Hendrix Tribute Band project, while recording with local artists and performing in nightclubs throughout his native city.

Diego López



Diego López was born in 1968 in Milano, Italy. He started playing piano and drumset at the early age of 11. By the time he was 15, he had already established himself as quite a versatile player, working professionally with local bands and playing everything from jazz and rock to Brazilian, Cuban and other Latin American genres. He also tried his hand at various percussion instruments, such as the tumbadora and the timbal. He played these instruments by ear, picking up the basic tumbao and cascara patterns or whatever else he could by listening to recordings of Mongo Santamaría, Tito Puente, Orestes Vilató and Ray Barretto. Fate stepped in when he was just 18 years old, and a local agency that specialized in booking North American acts hired him. Pretty soon, López was touring throughout Western Europe and the Mediterranean. His degree of professionalism, even at such an early age, turned him into one of the most sought-after drummers. Sooner than later, he was working as a staff musician on Italian national television, playing for some of Italy's most popular TV shows. It was right around that time that he first heard Los Van Van during a concert in Milano, and that was all he needed to convince himself that he was going to master playing Cuban music.

Young and restless, López wanted to discover what the rest of the world was listening and dancing to, and this is why he relocated to the United States in 1991. His first stop was Illinois, where he willingly paid his dues in the local blues circuit, acquiring much-needed knowledge of Afro-American culture and song, harnessing its vibrant energy as he got his chops in tune to this hardcore street corner-based music, the kind that one could only find in a place like Chicago. This was the mecca of blues-jazz, a relatively new style that had become a giant commercial

enterprise during the late fifties and the sixties. Black American music had reached out and touched England, and eventually the African source of that rhythm.

Ultimately, he found his groove while touring with blues legends such as Pinetop Perkins, Otis Rush, Junior Wells, and Sugar Blue. During his nine years in the Windy City, Diego also worked with the likes of singer Shirley Scott, The Hensleys, and Steve Cole, while touring throughout the U.S. with the Drifters, the Coasters and Engelbert Humperdink. He quickly became one of Chicago's top session guys, recording hundreds of national TV and radio commercials. Although popular North American music was what had originally drawn young Diego to percussion, he was soon to be enlightened by another facet of rhythm, in the form of that ever-present and hypnotic groove which revolves around Cuban clave. In 1997, he was initiated into a circle of batá drummers led by Juan Fuentes. This group mostly played at bembés festivities and "toques de santo" rituals. But Diego López's education would not yet come full circle, not in Chicago anyway. He was still anxious to learn more, and he wished to be near the U.S. epicenter of Afro-Cuban jazz. Since his days in Italy, he had heard much about a cosmopolitan island where steel and iron structures reached up and touched the skies, and where jazz and clave were kindred spirits.

In 2000, Diego López relocated to New York City, where he immediately established himself in the local music scene, playing trap drums and timbal in what was commonly referred to as the "cuchifrito circuit." His knowledge of the Afro-Cuban "fundamento" was an asset to him, of course, when he began to play with the legendary drummer and singer Orlando "Puntilla" Rios. López quickly mastered the liturgy of the sacred santería music, appearing with Puntilla and Benjamín Bratt in the film "Piñeiro." For the next four years, he continued to play batá with Pedrito Martínez and Román Díaz, and even traveled with them to Brasil for the annual Candomblé Festival in Salvador (the capital of Bahia), as the first representatives of the Cuban-American santero community.

In 2002, López joined Gato Barbieri's band, with whom he toured around the world until 2007, while managing a regular work schedule with numerous bands in the metropolitan area. The list of Latin jazz artists that Diego López has performed with includes the likes of Dave Samuels & Caribbean Jazz Project, Diane Schuur, Oscar Hernández, Hilton Ruiz, Ray Vega, Paquito D'Rivera, Giovanni Hidalgo, Raphael Cruz, Edy Martínez, Chico Alvarez, and Jane Bunnett, among many others. In 2010, he became a steady member of the Latin Jazz All-Stars, a band that includes Dave Valentin, Steve Turré, Claudio Roditi, Pete Escovedo and many other internationally known musicians. In addition, he is currently touring with this own musical project.

He has participated in many recent recordings that have received international acclaim and airplay, including Dave Braham's "To Be Free," Raphael Cruz's "Time Travel," Víctor Rendón's "Fiesta Percusiva," Chris Washburne and the Syotos Band's "Fields of Moons, Pedro Bermúdez's "No Limits," Eddie Allen's "Salongo," Steve Kroon's "Without a Doubt," Andrea Brachfeld's "Into the World," and Joseph Diamond's "Keep Your Dreams." His friendly, easygoing demeanor and his laid-back personality have earned him the nickname of "Dieguito."

In addition to performing and recording, Diego López is a much sought-after maestro of

percussion, having mastered all Cuban percussion instruments such as timbal, conga, bongó and the West African-derived batá drums. He has taught jazz drumming and Latin percussion at the University of Fairbanks (Alaska) and at Urban Gateways-Jazz in School Programs and Old Town School of Folk Music in Chicago. In New York, he has been a regular at the Drummers Collective and the Afro-Latin Jazz Alliance's music programs. Since 2008, he has been teaching at Musical Connections, a program sponsored by Carnegie Hall.

Gabriel "Chinchillita" Machado



Percussionist Gabriel Machado was born in the Cuban province of Oriente, in 1952. He initially studied with his father (also named Gabriel), a bassist with Oriente's popular "Orquesta Gigante Miramar" during the 1940s and 1950s. By 1969, Chinchillita had mastered the tumbadoras (conga drums) while working with that same band, traveling throughout said eastern province, while playing at dances, festivals, shows and uninhibited carnival (mardi gras) celebrations, including Santiago de Cuba's lively and uninhibited conga. If you have never witnessed this yearly Santiago de Cuba phenomenon, well then, you just haven't partied. It is known as "la universidad de la calle" - the ultimate training ground for any percussionist on the island. Fast

forward a bit, and by 1979, young Gabrielito had already graduated from that particular school with honors.

As fate would have it, Chinchillita got his lucky break in 1980, upon arriving in New York (via the Mariel boatlift). Through the efforts of drummer Ignacio Berroa, he was introduced to the world of Latin jazz, where traditional Afro-Cuban rhythms and contemporary jazz elements go hand in hand. Under the guidance of Berroa, Gabriel was introduced to such artists as Claudio Roditi and Paquito D'Rivera, both of whom were delighted with his percussive skills. He quickly mastered the timbal, combining his knowledge of folkloric dance music with that of the ballroom. There were Latin night clubs scattered through all five New York City boroughs and in nearby New Jersey, so work was plentiful. So lucrative was the music scene at that time that Machado landed a steady job with the ever-popular Típica Novel, one of New York's premiere charanga bands. For the next seven years, he injected his rural but fiery "oriental" sound into Novel's urban New York City repertoire, giving it a more contemporary upbeat feel, as opposed to the traditional Aragón-style chachachá. Curiously, he really did not need to work with anyone else during this period, yet he found the time somehow to perform with the legendary José Fajardo, as well as with some of the other top charangas in the New York area such as Charanga 76 and Orquesta Broadway.

As lucrative as it may have been for Machado, he did not limit himself to play merely Cuban dance music. While still featured with Novel, he often worked in a variety of musical genres, from Latin pop to R&B to musical theatre, and even jazz. In fact, it was in the latter idiom that he would find his calling and land his most important gig. In 1982, Chinchillita began a series of tours and concerts with the renowned bandleader Lionel Hampton. It was the opportunity of a lifetime, and he fully appreciated the opening it afforded him. With the large Hampton aggregation, he had finally found a suitable place for someone like himself; someone whose dream had always been to get involved with that segment of the music world. Suddenly, he was no longer limited to the confines of the island of Manhattan. Now, he could travel throughout the world, and he did so in style for the next ten years. Machado had entered what he considered the big leagues, and he was highly regarded by all of the members of Hamp's "team."

Since his tenure with Hampton's band Machado has had the privilege of performing not only with Berroa and D' Rivera, in addition to other notable artists Dizzy Gillespie, Branford Marsalis, Arturo Sandoval, Jon Faddis, Lalo Schiffrin, Oriente López, and Las Hermanas Marquez. He was the favorite conga drummer of the late Juan Pablo Torres, with whom he recorded some great tracks on the defunct Caimán label. For four consecutive years, he played percussion with the Duke Ellington Orchestra, under the direction of Mercer Ellington. Chico O'Farrill once remarked to me that Chinchillita was "one-helluva-rhythm maker".

The field of jazz was good to him back then, but all of a sudden, the music industry experienced a truly strange transformation for the worst, and the venues began to disappear. Almost overnight, the city's mood changed. The change in musical tastes also became evident. Charanga bands died a quick death, and the conjuntos had to change their style completely. This was the beginning of the inspid era of "salsa romántica." Machado turned to Latin jazz, and began working with small groups that specialized in a less commercialized format.

During the last two decades of the twentieth century, Gabriel Machado performed regularly with Las Estrellas del Caribe, Steve Gluzband, Ochún and Mafimba, as well as with the Carnegie Hall Orchestra. Lately, he has been spotted cooking his spicy musical sauce with the New York Cuban All-Stars, or working in the midtown restaurant row area with either a four or five-piece group. But whether it is for the amusement of tourists or simply to provide the beat for hardcore mambo dancers, his zeal and his fire have not diminished. Gabriel Machado remains "one-helluva-rhythm maker."

Alex García



Drummer, composer and bandleader Alejandro García was born in Chile and raised in Cuba, where he studied classical European music, traditional Afro-Cuban rhythms and contemporary jazz percussion. He quickly mastered the drumset under the direction of Irakere's drummer Enrique Plá at the Ignacio Cervantes School of Music, fully incorporating Cuban and other Latin American rhythms into the jazz idiom, while simultaneously working in a variety of musical genres from pop to rock, theatre to jazz.

After residing in his native country for six years, García migrated to the USA in 1996, and immediately began to make a name for himself, sharing the stage with some of the most prominent bands and artists in New York's Latin jazz circuit. He was introduced to the local music scene by vocalist David Oquendo and pianist Oriente López, both of whom utilized his

drumming skills in their respective groups. He went on to perform with several theatrical companies, including Pregones Theater and Making Books Sing, while leading his own band, AfroMantra, with whom he recorded the 2007 CD "Uplifting Spirit." As a sideman, he has performed and recorded with numerous exponents of modern music, such as the late Juan Pablo Torres, Juan Carlos Formell, Alex Foster, Tony Cimososi, Frank Colón, Chris Washburne & Syotos, Omar Hakim, Marcus Miller, Meme Solís, David Oquendo, Israel Kantor, Harvie S, Charles Flores, Rachel Z, Victor Bailey, Najee, Tony Pérez, The Chico O'Farill Big Band, Alfredo de la Fé, Edy Martínez, Chico Alvarez, Steve Kroon, Cándido Camero, Paquito D'Rivera, Steve Turré, Carlos "Patato" Valdés and Graciela, just to mention a few. In his role as composer/arranger, he is the sole contributor to the repertoire of AfroMantra.

In addition, García has written music for documentaries, both in Cuba and Chile, and has collaborated with producers in the Spanish-language film industry. Some of his credits in that field include music for Havana's Ballet Nacional de Cuba ("Pavana para una infanta difunta" - 1986) and Ballet del Teatro Municipal de Santiago de Chile ("Tiempo de percusión" -1993). He currently works as a teaching artist for several non-profit organizations in New York City, such as the Brooklyn Academy of Music, Caribbean Cultural Center, Global Arts To-Go, Bronx Arts Ensemble and Multicultural Music Group. He finds this type of work quite challenging, and has been doing it for the last eight years. In 2008, his group was instrumental in the success of "Booked For the Evening: A Tribute to Oscar Hijuelos," an event conducted at the Westport Public Library in Westport, Connecticut, with the special participation of Cuban dancers Rita Macias and Pedro Domech (and highlighted by the appearance of Lucy Amaz.)

Alex García is currently working on his fourth production with AfroMantra, scheduled to be released in 2012. By then, it is hoped the Latin jazz category would have been reinstated by NARAS.

Héctor Torres



A true master of the timbal, Héctor Mauroza Torres was born in San Germán, Puerto Rico and was brought to New York City as an infant. He grew up in the Chelsea section of Manhattan (specifically, the area once known as "Little Spain" - a virtual breeding ground for talented musicians and composers.)

It was there that the young Torres began playing percussion instruments at the age of four. His family was quite musical, as it included various aunts, uncles, and cousins who played either

string or percussion instruments (or even sang in the neighborhood parties). His father, Héctor Torres Sr., was a musical artisan who handcrafted marímbulas, claves, güiros, and assorted hand drums. At an early age, the elder Torres encouraged his son to pursue a professional career in music. The younger Torres' enthusiasm and love for Cuban and other forms of Latin-American music led him to perform with various aggregations around the city. Among his multiple credits, I would have to include his collaborations with Ray Barretto, José Fajardo, Gene Hernández & Orquesta Novedades, Conjunto Mayombe, Grupo Caché, Conjunto Naborí, Sonido Isleño, Sunrise, Moonrats, Rey Saba, Iyasón, Charanga Kreación, Fuego 77, Son Moderno and Orquesta La Sorpesa.

I met Héctor Torres in 1974, at a basement jam session on 15th Street. At first, he seemed like a shy and timid individual, but I soon realized that when it came to performing and executing the intricate polyrhythms of Cuban music, he was as aggressive and fierce as any other player. And when he told me that Orestes Vilató was his favorite timbalero, I knew he had to have his act together. I was so taken by the feel he had for the music that I included him on my own debut album "Con el Ritmo del Tambó".

Shortly thereafter, Torres became one of the main ingredients in the sizzling sauce that the Palomonte Afro-Cuban Big Band was cooking up in such New York nightspots as SOB's, La Maganette, or the ever-popular West Gate Lounge. Throughout the years, I have had the pleasure of working with Torres both in small group settings and in large bands. Always the consummate accompanist, his timing is impeccable and his volume is invariably at a desired level, but then again, he has never wavered in bringing the rhythm to the fore. He can be forceful, decisive and complex and show absolutely no vacillation in his solos. Héctor Torres' determination in keeping the rhythm right in the pocket is a true sign of a pro. In recent years, he has been working on a regular basis with two groups, YeraSón and Vaya.



Observations of Festival del Cuatro

Text by Ismael "East" Carlo

Photos by Ismael Carlo and Felix Rodriguez



To sit and watch these performers do their thing their way, with pure talent from the soul, was an amazing treat. Music from these troubadours is rare, and it comes with the greatest of all human gifts, humility. I sat with them over dinner and talked of their visits to other lands and what they all did for a living aside from music. It's not an easy task to open up to a stranger, but once I

gained their confidence by announcing that I too was in the arts, it then became easy. These musicians are all educators and business entrepreneurs. What became apparent to me was how little I knew of the traditional music of Puerto Rico and how it has influenced much of what we dance to (take a look at the video from Banco Popular on Bomba y Plena, 2001). Although I was born in Cabo Rojo, I am what most people call nuyoricán, a term given to Puerto Ricans raised in New York City, which is not a valid reason for my lack of familiarity with Puerto Rican folkloric music, so here I was attending the Cuatro Festival and embracing a part of my culture that I was previously unfamiliar with.



The "Cuatro, which is the national instrument of Puerto Rico, is a ten string guitar that originated in Spain. Initially it was a four string instrument, hence the name "cuatro," which in the Spanish language means four. Years of evolution and design transformation make today's cuatro guitar a ten-string instrument that possesses five double pairs of strings. Also prevalent in the execution and formation of this folkloric Puerto Rican music is the Spanish acoustic guitar, the Taino percussion instruments of the güiro (a hollow gourd with grooves played with a wire fork), and gourd maracas, as well as drums inspired by the slaves brought to the island from Africa (bongó and conga drums).



I am proud of my heritage, and 12 year-old Carlos Gabriel Cabrera reinforces that pride with the dedication and passion he displays on the Puerto Rican cuatro. To be in the company of cuatro virtuosos such as Edwin Colón Zayas (the Jimmy Hendrix of the cuatro) and to hear the passionate vocals of Yezenia Cruz gave me an emotional surge of pride like nothing else. The audience was equally affected and responsive like only Puerto Ricans can be. The music of Puerto Rico, the traditional sounds of "música jibara", and especially the talent of Carlos Cabrera, serve as an inspiration for all the youth who know little of their parent's birthplace and its traditions, as well as for those of us who were raised outside of the island.



To the attendees, I want to share my deepest gratitude, GRACIAS. Your overwhelming participation speaks volumes for one of the most memorable moments for you and for me! Latin Beat Magazine thanks Roberto Rivera for his yearly trek from the East Coast to the West Coast to provide this wonderful Puerto Rican traditional music to an appreciative community in Southern California.

Paz. Ismael



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