

First Jazz Corner Competition (Notes by José dos Santos, translated by Bill Tilford)

#### MORE THAN AN AWARD, A SCHOOL

The half century of life of the dean of programs dedicated to the genre on Cuban radio, La Esquina del Jazz, of the radio station CMBF, National Music Radio, had as its highest celebration the creation of an Improvisation Contest for students, fans and young musicians. Despite not having the time required for a good dissemination of the call for participants, more than 30 applicants showed up to collect the folders with the 10 standards for participating.

Also with little margin to take them on, especially being rookies, only a few desisted from appearing in the qualifying rounds, whose sessions were held in the capital's club La Zorra y el Cuervo, one of the main sponsors of the new contest, inspired by the good impression left by JoJazz, which would fulfill this 2019 its 22nd edition, now with participants from 12 provinces.

The event promoted by La Esquina del Jazz in its 50th year - to which I have been linked for 26 years as a writer and producer - aspired to be a small link in this now great movement to promote the genre among young musicians who are enthusiastic about spontaneous creation and the freedom of creation, beyond the respected *pentagrama*. And I think it was achieved: without modesty I affirm it.

Personally, although from the beginning I participated in its management and organizational process, due to temporary health problems I missed the competition itself but the enthusiasm I perceived at a distance from the highly trained juries, and the station's management team reinforced the optimism with which we launched to organize it.

From the beginning, the transcendent purpose of this musical episode was outlined: the promotion, training and artistic enrichment of the participants. This was present from the beginning in a talk that presented to them the Bobby Carcassés National Music Prize, who chaired the jury in its first phase and is already legendary also for his contribution to the training of new generations of musicians.

Along with him, authorities such as professor Juan Piñera, the highly knowledgeable producer and musicologist Gloria Ochoa, the seasoned promoter and artistic director Alexis Vázquez (founder of JoJazz), and, in a second moment assuming the jury, another National Music Award winner, Joaquín Betancourt, had a very important complement of new generation laureates: Alejandro Falcón, Janio Abreu, Rolando Luna, and Edgar Martínez, with a special mention for Sergio Jiménez and his HabanaSer group, who served as support for the performance of all contestants from the elimination rounds to the public presentation of winners at the closing gala and a tribute to the program's half-century.

Then came the intense elimination sessions, in which they always ended with an exchange of the jury with everyone (classified or not for the final), as narrated with enthusiasm by Gloria Ochoa, also now the main producer of this auditory material, along with Alexis Vázquez. That means that at that time virtual workshops were held in which spontaneous master classes were given by the most experienced to help correct, perfect or expand upon what the newcomers had done in this brief closed setting.

That experience, after concluding the Contest, had as a climax a gala offered at the Teatro América, which was supplemented by , and to a great extent it was part of the process of, the realization of this recording, the main award to the winners that was made possible by the support from the Office of Silvio Rodríguez and EGREM.

The sessions dedicated to the recordings, adjusted according to the available time of the winners, including activities abroad, was another moment of great enrichment of knowledge and skills. In these they spoke of Cuban references such as Armando Romeu, Frank Emilio Flynn, Lili Martínez, and Chico O'Farrill, both in the piano field and in the treatment of strings and winds in the large orchestra format. During rehearsals and recordings, established figures such as Alejandro Falcón, Rolando Luna, Janio Abreu, Edgar Martinez and Lázaro Rivero "El Fino" contributed to the artistic growth of the new musicians.

Before the end of the 50th year of La Esquina del Jazz, this work was completed by future and current young stars –with some honorable exceptions such as the incombustible and dynamic Bobby Carcassés– with which the EGREM record company intends to start a series that will increase with productions of a contest that every two years will open another window for creative light of the Cuban musical future to show its talent.

## **GALA**

At the Teatro América, a gala was held for the fiftieth anniversary of the space (Jazz Corner), the 70th for the radio station and the 500th for the capital, with a program under the artistic direction of Alexis Vázquez and which featured those distinguished in the First Competition of Jazz Corner, supported by Sergio Jiménez's group, and special presentations with the pianist and director of the Cauce Group José Portillo, Bobby and Robertico Carcassés, and the Young Jazz Band of Joaquín Betancourt, with Alejandro Falcón as special guest.

## **Opinions With Merit**

### **Bobby Carcassés**

To speak about the jazz improvisation contest sponsored by CMBF, it is only necessary to express that art in Cuba comes from the same source of sport (because phenomena such as Rita, Juantorena, Bola, Stevenson, Benny, Sotomayor occur naturally. ..) and from our music institutions - call them conservatories, institutes or simple schools, the great achievement of the Revolution - come the geniuses who swell the enormous wealth and heritage of Cuban culture.

There we saw youngsters, almost children, create forms of great flight and a maturity that can only be explained through reincarnation. Singers. Instrumentalists, they gave us their expertise and also their hearts. The CMBF radio station reminds me of Horacio Hernandez who gave his life and love to the jazz of that music station and his follower, the humble and simple José Dos Santos who picked up the torch left by that maestro. It was a great honor for me to preside over the jury who found it very difficult to decide the winners due to the indisputable quality of all the contestants.

We are sure that in the already-near 2021, it will be even better.

### **Sergio Jiménez**

The contest had an opening with firm steps although with some elements to mature with the passage of time ... It is important to promote young Cuban jazz from all possible initiatives and this is undoubtedly a correct way to motivate the young and future artists of our country.

## **José Dos Santos / 17.12.2019**

## **COMPETITION:**

### STUDENT AND AMATEUR CATEGORY AWARDS:

- 1st place shared: Alejandro Mendoza Castro (Alto saxophone, 18 years & Armando Soler Sebasco (Trombone, 16 years)
- 2nd place: Leonardo Sergio Acosta García (Piano, 18 years)

### PROFESSIONAL CATEGORY AWARDS:

- 1st place : Carlos Ángel Valdés Carbonell (Vocalista, 40 años)
- 2nd place shared:: Osmel Nápoles Pérez (Tumbadoras, 24 years) & Arian Benigno Boloy Stivan (Drums, 20 years)

### Mentions:

- Claudio González Hernández (Flute)
- Juan Carlos Poveda Alfonso (Electric guitar)

### Special prizes:

- Armando Soler Sebasco (Trombone) Premio AHS
- Arian Benigno Boloy Stivan (Drums) Cia. JJ Curso Tambores Batá
- Osmel Nápoles Pérez (Tumbadoras) Cia. JJ Curso Tambores Batá
- Carlos Ángel Valdés Carbonell (Vocalist) Bobby Carcassés Special Prize