

*"Master Cuban Drummer Calixto Oviedo thoroughly demonstrates traditional and contemporary Cuban rhythms on drum set and timbales from danzón to timba! Recorded, transcribed and produced by Kevin Moore, 'Beyond Salsa Percussion' is authentic and easy to understand – a must for every drummer."*

*"El genial baterista cubano, Calixto Oviedo, demuestra los ritmos cubanos tradicionales y contemporáneos en la batería y el timbal – desde el danzón tradicional a la timba de ahora. Transcripción, grabación, y producción por Kevin Moore, 'Beyond Salsa Percussion' es auténtico y fácil de comprender ... un método para todo baterista!"*

**Walfredo de los Reyes, Sr.**

*"Calixto Oviedo, para mí, representa el percusionista y drummer cubano con mayor proyección e información internacional de su época. Coincidimos en la orquesta de Pacho Alonso y le imprimió un sello moderno y especial al ritmo "pilón". Después, en NG La Banda, fue capaz de asumir la responsabilidad de llenar y llevar la sección rítmica de una agrupación de mucho peso. Solamente hay que escuchar sus grabaciones como "Échale limón" y "Santa palabra". No he conocido a nadie con la capacidad de memorizar diferentes repertorios como él. Se puede dar el lujo de tocar sin ensayar con cualquier orquesta cubana. Tiene memoria absoluta. Calixto es de los más completos músicos cubanos. Un respeto para mi hermanito."*

*"For me, Calixto Oviedo is the most influential percussionist of his era. We played together in Pacho Alonso's group, where Calixto put his own special, modern stamp on Pacho's famous "pilón" rhythm. Later, when he joined NG La Banda, you only have to listen to recordings like "Échale limón" and "Santa palabra" to hear how capably he was able to drive that heavyweight rhythm section. I've never met anyone with Calixto's ability to memorize the entire repertoire of a band so quickly. He can play, without rehearsal, with any Cuban orquesta. He has a photographic memory for rhythm. Calixto is one of the most complete of all Cuban musicians. Props to my brother."*

**Issac Delgado**

*"Calixto Oviedo is the sole creator of the latest grooves in popular Cuban music, what we know as Timba, with the integration of timbales and drumset. Impeccable taste and technique, combined with his knowledge of Afro-Cuban rhythms, make Calixto a musician to follow. This book is a testimonial to all of that."*

**Horacio "El Negro" Hernández**

*"Calixto Oviedo is for me one of the biggest musicians to come off the island of Cuba in recent years. I have had the opportunity to play with Calixto many times and hope to continue playing with him in the future. I consider him to be a talented musician and a great person to know ."*

**Luis Conte**

*"Calixto es sin dudas un verdadero tesoro de nuestra musica cubana."*

*"Calixto is, without a doubt, a treasure of Cuban music."*

**Carlos Caro**

*"Among Cuban drummers, Calixto Oviedo is the most innovative musician. I learned all about Cuban rhythms from him. Thank you Calixto!"*

**Akira Jimbo (Japan)**

*"Calixto Oviedo is the Elvin Jones of Cuban music."*

**Peter Suwalski (Denmark)**

*"Calixto Oviedo es un gran músico que ha sabido asimilar, no sólo las influencias de los grandes bateristas afro-cubanos de generaciones anteriores (Barreto, Del Monte, de los Reyes, etc.) sino también la de las luminarias del jazz y (Rich, Colaiuta), hasta crear su propio estilo y convertirse a su vez en una referencia obligada para las nuevas generaciones. Resulta, indiscutiblemente, uno de los creadores de los patrones rítmicos de la música cubana contemporánea, especialmente de los géneros asociados a la Timba."*

*"Calixto Oviedo is a great musician who has been able to assimilate not only the influences of the great Afro-Cuban drummers of earlier generations (Barreto, Del Monte, de los Reyes, etc.) but also of the jazz masters (Rich, Colaiuta), creating his own style that has become, in and of itself, a standard for later generations. Calixto is indisputably one of the creators of the rhythmic patterns of contemporary Cuban music, especially in regard to timba and related genres."*

**Juan de Marcos**

# BEYOND SALSA PERCUSSION



## VOLUME 2 • CALIXTO OVIEDO DRUMS AND TIMBALES: BASIC RHYTHMS

by Kevin Moore

photography by Tom Ehrlich  
audio and video companion products available at [www.timba.com/percussion](http://www.timba.com/percussion)

## Biography and Discography



Calixto Oviedo was born on October 14, 1955 in the Havana barrio of La Vibora. His father ran the laundry of the Hotel Nacional, but his passion was playing the tres and improvising décimas. Calixto's earliest musical memories were at the age of two or three, waiting in front of the television, toy violin in hand, to play along with performances of his favorite band, Orquesta Aragón. It was at the advanced age of four, however, that it became clear to the young prodigy that his true calling was to play the drums. The toy violin was discarded in favor of a plastic bucket, several cans, and a frying pan, all of which he played with drumsticks fashioned from coat hangers.

Recognizing his son's unusual talent, Eusebio Oviedo began to bring his five-year-old son along to the hotel where he was able to sneak backstage at the Cabaret Parisién to hear the house band. Quite a house band it was, featuring the likes of Rubén González and Jorge Varona. Calixto refers to the Cabaret Parisién as "my university".

At age seven, Calixto fell in love – with a toy drumset he had spotted in the window of a shop. It seemed destined to be an unrequited love, however, as the 55 peso price tag placed it well out of reach for his working class family. But one afternoon, strolling past the Radio Progreso building, Calixto was stunned to find a 50-peso bill lying on the sidewalk. His incredulous father took the bill to the Hotel to determine if it was counterfeit, but like its discoverer, it was very much the real deal, and Calixto soon acquired his first set of traps. He still has the toy drumset today in the family home in Havana.

Calixto's development was so fast and furious that at the age of eight, urged on by friends and neighbors, his mother took him to the conservatory to take an aptitude test. Incredibly, the bureaucrat who examined him concluded that he had no aptitude for percussion whatsoever. He

was offered admittance to the conservatory, but he would have to play violin or piano. To the horror of his mother, Calixto refused. He was going to be a drummer and no one was going to tell him otherwise. After he told the story to his mentors at the Cabaret Parisién, González and the others sent him, armed with their letter of recommendation, to Gonzalo Roig, the director of the national concert band. Roig placed him behind a set of timpani and asked him to play *cáscara* and then an improvised solo. Roig was so impressed that he pulled the necessary strings to arrange for Calixto's entrance to the conservatory – as a percussionist.

Thus Calixto's formal education began at eight, but by this point his nightclub woodshedding had already turned him into a formidable player. He had memorized the band's entire show and when they let him sit in (now 9 years old) he played all the way to the end of the set.

Four years later, Calixto had worked his way up to the two best percussion instructors in the country – Fausto García and Domingo Aragón. As always, he listened astutely to all of the current music, quickly identifying the ideal role model, José Luis "Changuito" Quintana, whom he first heard as a conguero with Felipe Dulzaides, and later, of course, on drumset with Los Van Van in 1970.



Calixto's first major group was formed in 1972 with future Van Van trombonist and arranger Hugo Morejón, future NG La Banda trumpeter José Miguel "El Greco" Crego, bassist Omar Hernández, singer Orestes Roque and conguero Santiago Gainza (pictured here on the left). It was Calixto who came up with the band's name, **Acheré**.

In 1977, Calixto began his mandatory stint in the army, but by this time he was in such demand that **Pacho Alonso** pulled sufficient governmental strings to allow Calixto to be a soldier by day and Pacho's drummer by night.

Calixto recorded about five albums with Pacho, including *El Guayabero*, and after the legendary singer's death in 1982, Calixto stayed on for another year with **Pachito Alonso**, who had taken over for his father. While at carnival in Santiago de Cuba, Calixto was reunited with his old schoolmate Adalberto Álvarez who was in the process of leaving Son 14 in order to form his own band in Havana, **Adalberto Álvarez y su Son**. Joining Calixto in the group was his old compay Hugo Morejón.

Adalberto Álvarez y su Son was one of the leading groups of the 1980s and Calixto's driving groove and unique sizzling hihat were a big part of their appeal.





I've created a special discography page for Adalberto Álvarez in the Timbapedia section of timba.com, including many photos of the original vinyl LPs and full listings of tracks, singers, composers and arrangers. Unfortunately, EGREM, Cuba's state-owned record label has never seen fit to release remastered versions of the original albums, as the Fania label has done so beautifully with the classic Nuyorican music of the 1960-1990 period. So unless you're a vinyl collector, the best way to hear

Calixto's work with Adalberto is the double CD pictured here (EGREM CD-0792). It has most of the bigs hits from Calixto's tenure with the group (1983-1990).

### Calixto's Original LP Recordings with Adalberto Álvarez y su Son



1985	Adalberto Álvarez & Omara Portuondo: <i>Canta el son</i>
1985	<i>Adalberto Álvarez y su Son</i>
1986	<i>El regreso de María</i>
1987	<i>Sueño con una gitana</i>
1988	<i>Fin de semana</i>
1990	<i>Dominando la partida</i>

Calixto's first two sons, Yulién and Yarién, were born in 1982 and 1986, respectively, and followed in their father's child-prodigy footsteps. On YouTube, you'll find many amazing and hilarious clips from Cuban television featuring Calixto trading licks with an 11-year-old Yulién, so small that he had to stand on boxes to reach the timbales, but so good that he could play back his father's ferocious timbal licks with ease. Calixto remembers Yulién as a 10-month-old toddler in his stroller, watching a music show on television and tapping rumba clave with perfect timing. Calixto's third son Adrián, born in 2008, is showing similar aptitude and can also be seen in various priceless YouTube clips.

### The Roots of NG La Banda



Calixto in Japan – 1997

NG La Banda was one of the most important groups in Cuban music history, simultaneously representing a culmination of the best music of the 1980s and a series of bold innovations that helped to define the “timba” style of the 1990s and beyond.

While Calixto was with Adalberto, José Luis “El Tosco” Cortés, the future leader of NG La Banda, was in Irakere, along with several other horn players, including José “El Greco” Crego from Calixto's Acheré days, who would eventually play with NG La Banda. Founding NG singers Issac Delgado and Tony Calá were with Pachito Alonso and Ritmo Oriental, respectively.

The post-1959 music scene in Cuba is somewhat similar to professional sports before the onset of free agency. The bandleaders and governmental agencies have an extraordinary amount of power over the musicians and with few exceptions, in order to play with one band, you have to play *only* with that band. This may seem odd to readers from the United States and Europe, where in order to make a living playing music, you usually have to play in at least half a dozen different bands. There's debate as to which system is better for musicians, but for fans, there's no contest. When the same talented players rehearse regularly – and *exclusively* – with one group, the group develops a unique sound, or *sello*, and the resulting competition among groups results in a much higher level of musicianship and creativity than would otherwise be the case.

The clever El Tosco, however, through persistence and political string-pulling, was able to record a series of experimental albums using top musicians from other bands who were able to retain their main jobs because El Tosco's group played only in the recording studio. The membership of El Tosco's group varied, as did its style – from experimental Latin Jazz to dance music that paved the way for NG La Banda and timba. The name of the band was also in constant flux: from **Todos Estrellas** to “**The New Generation All Stars**” to **Nueva Generación**. It was this last name that was shortened to “NG” when Tosco and his crew finally quit their day jobs to launch the historic **NG La Banda**.

### Calixto's Original LP Recordings with Nueva Generación



1986	<i>Abriendo el ciclo</i>
1987	<i>A través del ciclo</i>
1988	<i>No te compliques</i>

The most widely available CD to feature songs from this period is the above-pictured *Toda Cuba baila con NG La Banda* (MRX Records – MXD-2086).

Calixto remained with Adalberto in the late 1980s, so it was with drummer Giraldo Piloto, another key figure in Cuban music history, that NG La Banda made their breakthrough LPs, *En la calle* and *No se puede tapar el sol*, as well as several rare 1991 classics like *Rap de la muerta* and *Yo soy un hombre*.

In 1991, Calixto returned briefly to **Pachito Alonso y su Kini-Kini**, but in late 1991, when Piloto left NG La Banda to become the drummer and musical director of Issac Delgado's new group, Calixto joined NG and found himself touring with them in Perú within two weeks time. After a 3-month stint at Cancún's legendary Disco Azúcar nightclub, the group embarked on a tour of Europe and Japan that produced the live double album *En cuerpo y alma*.



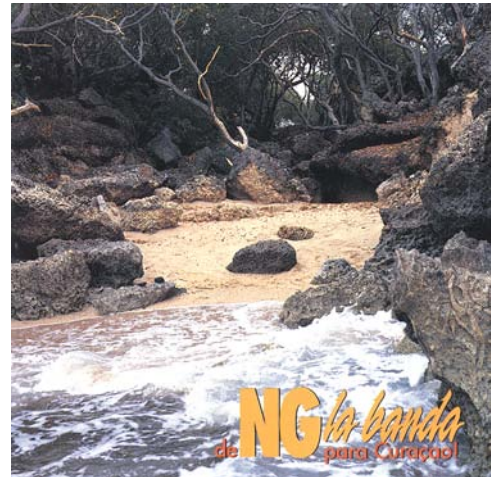
# NG

Echale Limón  
La BANDA



In November of 1992, NG La Banda completed a recording session in Japan that produced nine tracks, including several of the most important and celebrated in Cuban music history: *Santa palabra*, *Échale limón*, and *El trágico*. These three tracks, plus another track from the same session, *Murakami mambo*, will be studied in microscopic detail in Volumes 4 and 5 of the *Beyond Salsa Percussion* series. This album, shown at the left in one of its many incarnations, is an excellent companion to the material studied in this volume because it covers such a wide range of rhythms. Two additional tracks, *Danzón río sumida* and *Club 4 Cha Cha Chá* relate directly to Chapters 1 and 2, respectively, while yet another, *Conga negro cansado*, like the mozambique rhythm of Chapter 3, a modernized version of the Cuban carnival *conga* rhythm.

The nine tracks recorded in Japan were released with multiple titles and multiple covers as *Échale limón* (shown here: *Harmonia mundi 3006 038*), *Cabaret Panorámico* and several other discs. EGREM also released an LP entitled *Échale limón*, featuring several of the tracks from Japan and several others recorded in Cuba, including *Amor entre tres*, *El jinetero* and *Vuela paloma*. The latter was written by a young singer discovered by El Tosco and destined to be one of the biggest sensations of the 90s, Manolín “El Médico de la Salsa” González.



A minor release called *Para Curaçao*, (AVL93038CD), was made in May of 1993 while the band was on tour in the Dutch Antillean island. The most interesting track on this album is an early version of *La bruja*, later the title track of one of NG La Banda’s greatest albums.

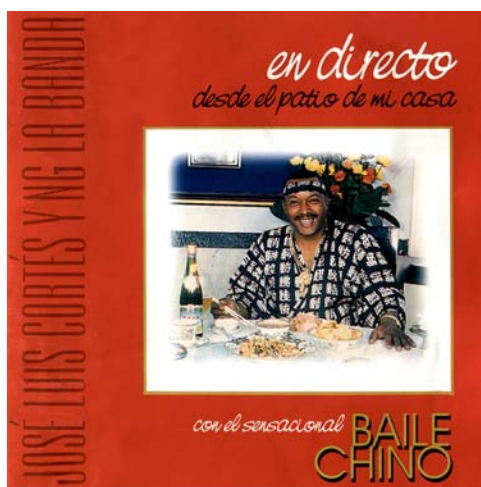
Later in 1993 came *La que manda*, (Inspector de la Salsa 9424), a lesser known, but excellent collection of original songs, including the wonderful *Hice mi papel*, a piece we’ll study in detail in a later volume. All ten tracks are originals and other standouts are *Con qué tú cuentas camará*, *Búscate un congelador*, and *Qué es esto*.



1994: NG La Banda: *La bruja*—Inspector de la Salsa

The masterpiece of the mid-90s period was *La bruja*, featuring several more songs we'll study in later volumes: *Te pongo mal*, *Picadillo de soya*, and the title track, *La bruja*. Other timeless classics from this album are *Un sueño terrible* and *La película del sábado*.

Calixto's last studio album with NG La Banda was *La cachimba*, in early 1995, which also included the legendary *Picadillo de soya*. Calixto also participated in various other El Tosco-produced projects, including the Latin jazz albums *Nuestro hombre en La Habana* and *Latin Fever* and *De allá pa' acá*, an all-star production reviving the name Orquesta Todos Estrellas and featuring famous Puerto Rican songs performed by top Cuban musicians.



October, 1995: NG La Banda: *En directo desde el patio de mi casa* – Caribe Productions CD 9462

In late 1995, perhaps inspired by Los Van Van's *Lo último en vivo*, El Tosco set out to record an entire album of new originals in front of a live audience. The result, recorded in late 1995 from the patio of El Tosco's house, was *En directo del patio de mi casa*, which included the big hit *La*

*apretadora* (studied in a later volume), *Papá Changó*, and *El baile chino*. It was Calixto's last recording with NG La Banda before moving to Sweden.

### Calixto's Original Recordings with NG La Banda



*Simplemente lo mejor de NG La Banda* (BIS Music – downloadable at [latinpulsemusic.com](http://latinpulsemusic.com))

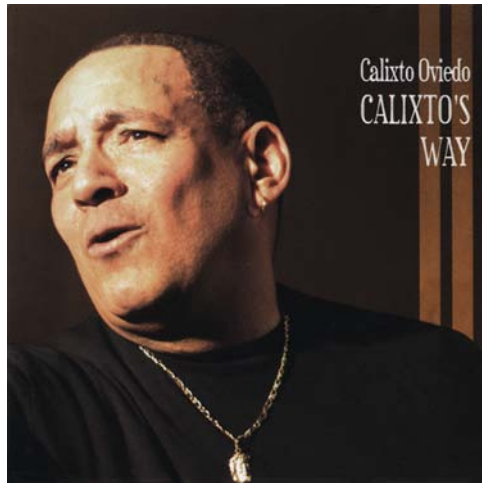
1992	tracks: <i>Amor entre 3</i> , <i>El jinetero</i> , <i>Vuela paloma</i>
1992	<i>En cuerpo y alma</i> (Live in Japan and Italy)
1992-11	<i>Échale limón</i> (Japan)
1993-05	<i>Para Curaçao</i>
1993	<i>La que manda</i>
1994	<i>La bruja</i>
1995	<i>La cachimba</i>
1995-10	<i>En directo desde el patio de mi casa</i> (live)

This compilation CD pictured above, *Simplemente lo mejor de NG La Banda*, lives up to its title, featuring no less than six of the nine tracks we'll study in depth in our later volumes: *Échale limón*, *Santa palabra*, *El trágico*, *Murakami mambo*, *La bruja*, and *Picadillo de soya*. *La apretadora* is only on the live album, *En directo desde el patio de mi casa*, *Te pongo mal* is only on *La bruja* and *Hice mi papel* is only on *La que manda*.

## Calixto's Recordings Under His Own Name



2000: Calixto Oviedo: *La recompensa* (EGREM)



2005: Calixto Oviedo: *Calixto's Way* (EYS 016)

In late 1996, Calixto left NG and moved to Sweden where he still lives today, but he's continued to travel to Cuba to record. In 2000, under his own name, he recorded *La recompensa* for EGREM, a great timba album with an all-star cast, including his two sons Yulién and Yarién and singers Michel Maza, Haila Mompíe and Tirso Duarte.

In 2005, he released *Calixto's Way*, a high energy Latin Jazz album recorded in Europe.

As of 2010, Calixto has several groups in Europe, including the timba band **La Jugada** and the Latin Jazz band **Calixto Oviedo and the Latin Train**. He also tours regularly with **The Afro-Cuban All-Stars**, a phenomenally successful group led by Juan de Marcos, the mastermind behind the Buena Vista Social Club phenomenon. Most of the recent concert photos in these books are from recent Northern California concerts of the Afro-Cuban All-Stars.

# Calixto's Equipment



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