

Musicological notes for the CD/DVD

Mirando al futuro from Havana Jazz

We can place the arrival of jazz in Havana at the beginning of the 20th century; but its assimilation as a genre was established around 1930, when Cubans like Armando Romeu, Isidro Pérez, Chico O'Farrill and Germán Lebatard worked the jazz band format typical of American jazz. They conditioned a taste among the musicians and the public of the island for the sound, its phrasing, diction and characteristic attack. These processes of conscious assimilation of elements of North American jazz, fused with elements of Afro-Cuban music, are known as Latin jazz or Afro-Cuban jazz, which is consolidated in a bilateral exchange between the musical cultures of Cuba and the United States. and styles from both currents have enriched Afro-Cuban jazz, endowing it with creativity, a sense of innovation, experimentation and belonging.

The development of the genre in Cuba remained stable despite the difficulties in the 1960s. From 1973 with the emergence of the group Irakere, under the direction of the pianist, composer and arranger Chucho Valdés, Afro-Cuban jazz returned to reposition itself as a preferred style in the national musical labor, but it is not until the 80's that it internationalizes its diffusion, with the promotional management developed by the Jazz Plaza Festival within the Cuban music scene.

Today in the XXI century we can reaffirm the presence of a young generation of musicians, graduates of art schools, who take jazz as a priority form of expression and artistic identity. These young people gathered around the Jo jazz contest are searching for references that combine national work with the work of prominent musicians of the genre worldwide, thus reconfiguring the traditions that preceded them with their interests as performers. In this way, they have achieved novel experimental results in the field of generic hybridizations.

The creation of the JoJazz contest in 1998 by the artistic director Alexis Vázquez gave rise to the possibility of visualizing and recognizing, nationally and internationally, the musical level reached by the young generation of Cuban musicians, reaffirming them as a vanguard artistic movement.

Mirando al futuro from Havana jazz is the title of this CD / DVD whose intention is to show the quality and comprehensiveness that distinguishes the work of these musicians who, in search of their own musical language based on jazz references in Cuba, have been able to incorporate all of contemporary musical creation without generic distinction and articulate it with our traditional genres: son, guaracha, changüí, rumba, cha cha chá, bolero, mambo and Afro-Cuban rhythms, present spontaneously in this recording.

Shaping the album was a complex process, we tried to show a summary, as complete as possible, of the movement's aesthetic leaders, which is in itself vast, which made the process of musical production and recording difficult as many of the works chosen they are totally different in terms of format and style.

This particularity allowed each project manager to be responsible for musically directing and arranging his works, which are mostly original, composed especially for this recording. This contributed to our work as a music producer defending an objective and integrative approach in its conformation, respecting the timbre and particular aesthetics of each one of them.

The selection of the works responds to the musical criteria expounded and the availability of these musicians at the time of recording the album. They cover all possible organological areas, the pianos are present with Rolando Luna, Roberto Fonseca, Harold López-Nussa, Alejandro Falcón and Alejandro Meroño, the woodwinds and brass with Yasek Manzano, Yoandy Argudín, Thommy Loury, Michel Herrera, Janio Abreu and Eduardo Sandoval and vocalists Janet Valdés, Zule Guerra and Geidy Chapman.

The difficult art of accompanying, where restraint is a virtue, was masterfully defended by the percussionists: Rodney Barreto, Ruly Herrera, Edgar Martínez, Adel González, Ruy Adrian López-Nussa and Yissy García, bassists Yandy Martínez, Carlos Ríos, Samuel Burgos and Rafael Aldama, in the winds the experienced ones: Carlos Mijares, Emir Santa Cruz and Yuniet Lombida, among other outstanding musicians, up to a total of 55. They formed this exceptional and unique proposal that brings together two generations of Cuban jazz players and is supported in the experience of great consecrated people of the genre such as Robertico García, Javier Zalba and Ruy Francisco López-Nussa.

When entering the works we find maturity in the interpretation, coherence of the musical discourse based on the organological structure and a high level of execution according to the format and selection of the repertoire, such is the case that works are defended from a jazz band led by the outstanding musician Roberto Fonseca, the most international of them all, whose maturity in the aesthetic proposal confirms what it is to be an artist, interpreting the theme that begins the album *The Jounet*. We also find formats such as the classic trio with the standard *For All We Know*, where the vast knowledge of Cuban and universal music characterizes the masterful performance of the pianist Rolando Luna and the accompanying musicians. For its part, the Cubadentro quartet performs the piece *Un argentino en La Habana*, directed by Alejandro Falcón, who reinvents from contemporary jazz codes, with a deep technical knowledge of the academy, a genre as Cuban as the *danzón*. An atypical format such as the wind quartet, (flute, flugelhorn, clarinet and trombone, double bass, drums and voice with the masterful interpretation of the classic bolero *La mentira*, performed by Havana Wind Factory and Zule Guerra and directed by a virtuoso musician in the domain of wind instrument technique, harmony and composition, trumpeter Yasek Manzano

The search and experimentation of a particular contemporary timbral, achieved by a specific organological composition: quartet base with wind sextet (clarinet, flute, soprano sax, trumpet, trombone and bassoon), organic consistency and coherence in the structure of the work, the quality of the harmonic work and the use of the timbres in order to differentiate colors that reaffirm the solidity of the concept in the orchestration, highlighting the different nuances and sound planes, are qualities that distinguish the masterful interpretation of the genre with the work *Looking for Fantasy* by Yoandy Argudín and Cuban Evolution.

If we focus on listening to a unique sound, the work of Michel Herrera and Madre Tierra Project stands out, which focuses its search on a characteristic rhythm where asymmetric measures are part of the fundamental element in the musical discourse, based on a unique sound virtuosically developed by the saxophone. We also find sounds of the trumpet that recall the great glories of Cuban jazz, classic artists such as the virtuoso trumpeter Varona, who left his inheritance in these young people. Looking to the future in the interpretation of Thommy Loury & Quinters is an example of this, where the mastery of the melody, harmony and a high level of performance make him today one of the best lead trumpets in Cuba, sounds of a melodious trombone with an exquisite level of performance assumed by Eduardo Sandoval and Habana jazz, they take us back to the timbre of Juan Pablo Torres.

The synthesis of a virtuous interpretation of the traditional essences of Afro-Cuban songs in a minimalist way, where the strength and passion in expression make Yeyeo a unique work, consolidates the maturity of Janet Valdés and Alejandro Meroño.

In the same way, we can hear in Cimarrón, by Harold Lopez-Nussa, the Cuban roots heritage, where the *syncopa*, the counterpoint, the clave and the anticipated bass, among other characteristics of the Cuban piano, are offered in a flamboyant way, showing off a high level of interpretation and mastery of the instrument in its articulation with the exceptional performance of the cajón.

For his part, clarinetist Janio Abreu y Aires in concert with his work Traveling, shows us a way in the search for a timbre articulated with the influence of concert music that becomes a very Cuban chamber jazz where tradition is evident .

This first phonographic volume reaffirms how important it is for the future of music in our country to protect and develop this line of creation that includes two generations of Cuban musicians. They are the music now, they play without false egos and in my opinion, they form one of the fundamental branches of the artistic vanguard of Cuban music in this millennium.

I hope that when enjoying this work we always remember, as the troubadour says: "... the dream is made by hand and without permission ..." ¹

Gloria Ochoa de Zabalegui Aguilera *

Musicologist

¹ Silvio Rodríguez. Tema

* Translated into English by Bill Tilford