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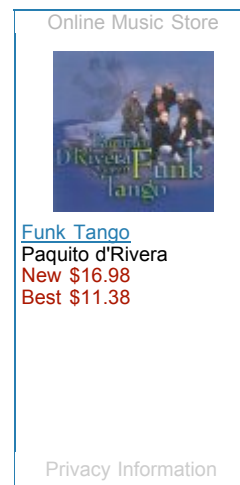
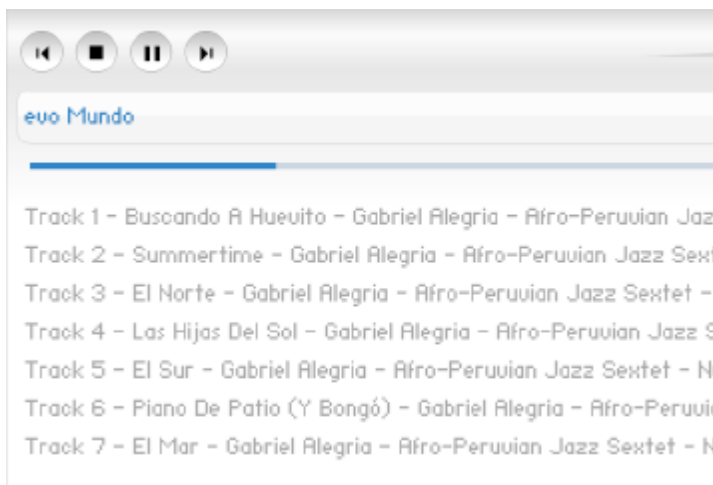
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Posted on March 8, 2008

Gabriel Alegria – Afro-Peruvian Jazz Sextet Nuevo Mundo (New World) - Saponegro Records – 2008

By Danilo Navas

The Afro-Peruvian Tradition

When we refer to music from Peru, it's very common to think of it as the music originated in the Andes, performed by natives, with panflutes, drums and some other folk instruments. For many, it is a surprise to find out about the existence of a thriving, black, African-based musical tradition in Peru. Of course the history of slavery in this Latin American country is strongly tied up to the development of the Afro-Peruvian tradition, a fascinating mixture of Spanish, Native and African musical elements. The way Afro-Peruvian music and dance came into existence is rather interesting, to say the least. There are two interesting articles that give us detailed explanation on the subject. The first one, **Afro-Peruvian Percussion**, by Alex Pertout. The second one, **Afro-Peruvian Music**, by Dan Rosenberg.

Endangered in the past, almost at the point of extinction, the Afro-Peruvian tradition now flourishes and experiences an incredible resurgence. I believe Gabriel Alegria and his band are contributing enormously to take it one step forward, placing it at the forefront of a global Jazz fusion movement that sees musical traditions from all over the world being integrated into the Jazz language.

First Contact

I met Gabriel Alegria at his booth in the Exhibition Hall, during the 35th Annual IAJE Conference in Toronto, last January. He was handing out information about his upcoming concert with The Afro-Peruvian Jazz Sextet at the Royal York Hotel, and about a Peruvian Tour, a rather interesting concept he's organizing for enthusiasts with a taste for traveling, culture and music. The idea is that Gabriel and his band travel Peru with their guests for 10 days, from one side to the other, longitudinally. During the day they get to know historical places and in the

evening participate in percussion workshops and drum circles. Gabriel was also promoting the 2008 Peru Jazz Festival, organized by Jazz Peru Internacional, from which he is the founder. He's also Artistic Director of the Festival.

The Concert

Previous to the concert, it hit me the promotional grassroots approach utilized by Gabriel and his crew. They were handing out small flyers for their show, happening on Saturday, January 11, at 7pm. That was the very last day of the conference, a time when many attendees are already burnt out and thinking of abandoning the scene. Nevertheless, there was a good and attentive audience at The Royal York Hotel on the night of the concert.

Toronto was one of the stops of a North American Tour by Gabriel Alegria and his Afro-Peruvian Jazz Sextet. They put on a show that wowed the audience. It was a lively performance with a high level of musicianship. They are tight; they are hip and funky, and definitively jazzy. They have so much fun on stage! As one of my friends put it, "hard bop meets Afro-Peruvian rhythms." The result is rhythmically complex and sophisticated, yet so appealing to the senses. They opened up the concert with a rendition of "Summertime" that George Gershwin would have enjoyed until the last note. Tierney Sutton added her beautiful voice in one of the numbers, scatting and using her voice as a true musical instrument. Another highlight of the show was master percussionist Freddy Lobatón, who plays cajon (box drum), cajita, quijada de burro (donkey's jaw bone). Freddy goes by the nickname of "Huevito." He's also a three-times national champion in Afro-Peruvian zapateo dancing competitions.

It was a real surprise and a real pleasure to hear Gabriel and his band. Gabriel is an accomplished musician, a very articulate presenter and a very talented entertainer. He holds a doctorate degree in Jazz Studies from the University of Southern California and presently works as Assistant Director of Jazz Studies at New York University.

The Recording

I've grown accustomed to think mostly of Afro-Cuban, or Afro-Brazilian rhythms when hearing/reading the phrase "infectious rhythms." It's commonly used to refer to the pulsating, vibrating fusion of Jazz and Latin music. After listening to "Nuevo Mundo" and experiencing live Gabriel Alegria and his Afro-Peruvian Jazz Sextet, after taking in their unique brand of Jazz fusion, the term "infectious rhythms" acquires a new dimension.

This is a fresh and stimulating sound coming out of Peru. The fusion of Afro-Peruvian rhythms and Jazz is seamless, very organic and full of excitement. Trumpet artist Gabriel Alegria opens doors to a New World with his sextet. "Nuevo Mundo" is an excellent recording produced by Bobby Shew, who is also a special guest on it. Other guests include Tierney Sutton, Russell Ferrante, Bill Watrous and Lisa Harriton.

The Songs

1. Buscando a "Huevito" (Searching for "Huevito") - Gabriel Alegria

Freddy Lobatón's nickname is "Huevito," and he's quite a character, and very evasive. Freddy is not only a great percussionist, but a consummate dancer as well. On this piece Gabriel tells the story of the difficult task of trying to find "Huevito." This piece is constructed as a three-parts suite: swing/festejo, landó and swing/festejo. Bill Watrous plays his mighty trombone on the first part, and Bobby Shew shines on trumpet on the second part.

2. Summertime (George Gerswin)

The only cover on the recording. The smokiest and swingiest version of this classic standard that I have heard lately.

3. El Norte (The North) - Gabriel Alegria/Jocho Velásquez/Joscha Oetz

Based on the chords of Dave Brubeck's "Take Five" this is a collective composition where Tierney Sutton sings the main melody. Rhythmically is a festejo in 5/4 in which the cajón and the cajita have room for improvisation.

4. Las Hijas Del Sol (The Daughters of The Sun) - Gabriel Alegria

An enchanting, moving song that tells the story of the beautiful girls chosen by the Incas to be "sacrificed" to their deities. Russ Ferrante is the special guest on keyboard on this piece.

5. **El Sur (The South)** - Gabriel Alegria

It represents the peacefulness and strength of the Southern, deserted region of Peru, which borders with the Pacific Ocean.

6. **Piano De Patio Y Bongó (Backyard Piano and Bongó)** - Gabriel Alegria

The story of this song could be extracted from one of Mario Vargas Llosa's novel. According to Gabriel, this piece is a concert for trumpet and bongo. There was this old piano at the Satchmo Jazz Bar in the city of Miraflores. The piano was left outdoors, in the patio, and Gabriel used it to finish composing this piece, in spite that some of the keys were broken. Realismo Mágico, indeed.

7. **El Mar (The Sea)** - Gabriel Alegria

On this piece, Gabriel exchanges flugelhorn solos with Laurandrea's inspired tenor playing. It's dedicated to the magnificent nature of the Pacific Ocean, in Southern Peru.



Gabriel Alegria - Biography

Gabriel Alegria is one of the most influential figures of the jazz music scene in Peru. He is exploring and developing a uniquely Afro-Peruvian jazz music concept by combining the common African roots found in American jazz music and Afro-Peruvian music from the coast of Peru. In all of Gabriel's music, the rich legacy of the black music of coastal Peru can be heard in the context of contemporary jazz expression. The importance of this approach has been compared to the Brazilian and Cuban musical contributions that changed jazz music in the 20th century.

Gabriel was born in Lima, Perú in 1970 into a very creative family. Gabriel's grandfather Ciro was Peru's most famous novelist and his father Alonso is Peru's most acclaimed playwright. Today Gabriel is one of the most influential figures of the jazz music scene in Perú.

Musically Gabriel combines his personal approach to American jazz with a passionate interest and careful study of the music of black coastal Perú. He has contributed a uniquely Afro-Peruvian jazz music concept by incorporating and exploring the common African roots found in both styles. The results can be heard and seen on these pages.

In all of Gabriel's music, the rich legacy of the black music of coastal Perú can be heard in the context of contemporary jazz expression. The importance of this approach has been compared to the Brazilian and Cuban musical contributions that changed jazz music in the 20th century. The 2002 AIJP records release "Un Rezo" placed many of the Afro-Peruvian rhythmic concepts solidly into the mainstream jazz language for the first time.

Gabriel's latest recording Nuevo Mundo features collaborations from jazz stars Tierney Sutton, Bobby Shew,

Russell Ferrante and Bill Watrous as well as Peru's formidable resident Afro-Peruvian artists: Freddy "Huevito" Lobaton, Hugo Alcázar, Jocho Velázquez and Joscha Oetz. The recording is inspired on locations and situations along the rich and mysterious Peruvian coastline.

Gabriel's most recent and varied performance credits as a trumpet player and composer span the globe and include in concert appearances and/or recordings with Maria Schneider, Plácido Domingo, Ingrid Jensen, Tierney Sutton, Natalie Cole, The Lima Philharmonic, The Peruvian National Symphony, Bill Watrous, John Thomas, Russ Ferrante and Alex Acuña as well as concerts for the United Nations and various diplomatic missions from around the world. In May 2005 Gabriel conducted and recorded Didier Lockwood's Afro-Peruvian jazz opera "Libertad" commissioned by Radio France and Opera Montpellier. Gabriel was also the subject of a documentary film about Afro-Peruvian music directed by Lonnie Goodwin.

Gabriel holds a doctorate degree in jazz studies from the University of Southern California, a master's degree from the City University of New York and a bachelor's degree from Kenyon College. His knowledge of Afro-Peruvian music has come from fieldwork and time continuously spent in Perú learning from the greatest exponents of the art form.

In 2000 Gabriel founded Jazz Peru Internacional (JPI), Peru's premier jazz arts and cultural exchange organization. Through JPI, countless artists, students and music fans have toured the world. Gabriel's goal is to spread the message of peace, love and joy found in Afro-Peruvian music.



The Band

Gabriel Alegría: trumpet, flugelhorn, composer and arranger
 Freddy "Huevito" Lobatón: percussion (cajón, cajita, quijada de burro), zapateo dancing
 Laura Andrea Leguía: tenor saxophone
 Hugo Alcázar: drums, percussion
 Joscha Oetz: acoustic bass
 Walter "Jocho" Velásquez: acoustic guitar

Line up for the 2008 North American Tour
 Gabriel Alegría: composition, trumpet & flugelhorn
 Freddy "Huevito" Lobatón: cajón, quijada, cajita & zapateo dancing
 Hugo Alcázar: drums and percussion
 Laurandrea Leguía: tenor saxophone
 Yuri Juarez: guitar
 Ramon de Bruyn: bass and vocals

To know more about Gabriel Alegria visit: www.gabrielalegria.com and www.jazzperu.org

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