

Warm sounds for a cold fall

by Philip Klint

It seems that the bulk of Latin music performed in Toronto is reserved for the summer months, a time when the merengue, salsa and even tex-mex sounds blend in effortlessly with cut-off shorts and outdoor patios.

But the Latin American musical scene should be promoted more heavily when shivering Torontonians need it most. You know: those days when every single part of your body has frozen before the York bus makes its belated appearance.

Fortunately, just as Latin music lovers were preparing for another dreary winter, renowned latin jazz master Poncho Sanchez and his nine-piece band made a well-timed appearance in the gaudy blue neon confines of the Bermuda Onion. Sanchez delivered a tight set to a surprisingly quiet audience (perhaps they were still numb from the cold outside), playing what he calls the "traditional sounds of Afro-Cuban music."

Sanchez is a "purist;" he did not stray too far into extended solos or improvisational flights of fancy. However, his conga playing is always steady. Aided by the Banda brothers (Tony on bass and Ramon on timbales), it was evident that this band, which has been together for 11 years, will continue to be among the top Latin percussion groups in the world.

Sanchez was born in Laredo, Texas, the youngest of 11 children. Surprisingly, he began listening to what at that time was called "musica cubana" (now known as salsa), not the ranchera or mariachi music more common in that part of the United States. His early influences were Tito Puente and Machito, two giants of the Latin scene who were instrumental in providing American audiences with the taste of Latin music. Later, when he moved to Los Angeles,

concert

Poncho Sanchez
Bermuda Onion
Friday, September 27

he listened to Count Basie, John Coltrane, Art Blakey and other jazz legends.

Sanchez has now been playing for almost 27 years. He has been nominated for two grammys, the latest for his album *Chile con Soul*, a collaboration with Tito Puente.

Sanchez is pleased that the Latin sounds have begun to seep into more of the commercial Western music. He cites the efforts of Paul Simon and David Byrne to make these sounds more accessible to North American audiences.

"It is always great to see the Latin music grow and expand. I am extremely pleased that you can hear the Latin rhythms through all walks of music now; for us Latinos it is especially important, because it is part of our culture and heritage, and it is nice to see that our music is being recognized."

On a final note, the biggest Latin concert in recent memory has had Latin music lovers buzzing for almost a month now. Memo Acevedo, a tireless promoter of Latin jazz and the Latin music scene, has put together a "Latin Spectacular" featuring five of the finest latin music artists together on stage.

The King of Salsa himself, Tito Puente, will be joined by Johnny Pacheco, Dave Valentin and Acevedo at Massey Hall on Friday. The big draw, however, will be Gonzalo Rubalcaba, the talented Cuban pianist who wowed Toronto audiences a few months ago at the now defunct El Mocambo.

Unfortunately, because of the cultural and economic embargo imposed by the United States on Cuban artists, much of Rubalcaba's music



Poncho Sanchez smiles from the cover of his latest album, *Chile con Soul*. His performance at the Bermuda Onion, although it didn't stray too far into extended solos or improvisation, was strong.

has never been heard outside of Cuba. There is one CD available in most record stores in Canada, entitled *Gonzalo Rubalcaba Live in Montreaux*. It features two jazz greats, Paul Motian and Charlie Haden, who in the 70s played with another piano virtuoso, Keith Jarrett.

Each musician on his own would be worth the price of admission, and the "descarga" jam session at the end of the concert should be truly amazing. Acevedo has really pulled a musical coup ensuring that the coming winter months will be a little warmer.



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