THIS MONTH, A SALSA-SPICED FESTIVAL SALUTES THE LATEST WAVE OF LATIN MUSIC

JAZZISTAS!

There's talk of a second coming. A new golden age of Latin jazz, a genre pioneered by saxist Mario Bauza some 40 years ago, is upon us. This month, the JVC Jazz Festival in New York features a salute to Bauza, as well as performances by a record number of younger Latin musicians. "There's extraordinary talent and more and more interest in this scene," says George Wein, who produces JVC. And no talents are more adventurously, more exuberantly on its cutting edge than Paquito D'Rivera, Daniel Ponce, and Michel Camilo.

Paquito D'Rivera's story reads, in part, like a Cold War novel. At age eight, already a classical soloist on the soprano sax, he heard a Benny Goodman record and "discovered music." In postrevolutionary Cuba, "jazz was considered imperialistic," he says, "and I was fast becoming a jazzista. After a while, the idea was just to get on the plane. I had had half a dozen bands in Havana. They all had 'jazz' in their names and the authorities weren't letting us on the plane. We named our last band there something African—Irakere—and, finally, we got on the plane." And, after 21 years of dreaming about it, D'Rivera defected. A few months later, he was part of Dizzy Gillespie's "dream band."

Now, after seven albums in about as many years in the States, D'Rivera is one of the most lyrical saxmen around. His horn is always singing, even when it crosses screaming into pure sound. He tells stories in silhouettes, finding climax after climax. Or he'll take a ribbon of sound and let it fly. Increasingly, he is opening traditional Latin music to jazz. On his recent *Celebration* album, he stirs a South American rhythm into a suite, elegant and seamless: part Charlie Parker, part rumba, part Stravinsky. His next record will take a classical turn, featuring works by Villa-Lobos and Cervantes, Latin masters little known in this country.

Like D'Rivera, Daniel Ponce came of age in Havana, part of a family of musicians. But the Ponces were devotees of the old African gods of the Yoruba faith, and their music was a call to their saints. What Ponce didn't learn about the drums from his grandfather, he taught himself sitting in old Chevys with friends listening to James Brown.

Ponce was one of the first to bring the *tambor bata*, or sacred drums, to American music. Not long after he arrived here, as part of the Mariel boat lift, he recorded with Mick Jagger, Ginger Baker, and Yoko Ono, as well as with Herbie Hancock on his hit "Rockit." On his recent *Arawe* album, Ponce marries traditional Yoruba songs—the songs of dance become trance become ecstasy—with wicked, wise-assed funk. The conga, one of the sexiest of instruments, becomes, via Ponce, particularly so. He strong-arms his music, his polyrhythmic patternings getting under the sound for more.

Remember those two guys in *Broadcast News* who came up with a glorious jumble of jazz for the evening news? That music was Michel Camilo's. A prodigy from the Dominican Republic, Camilo was the youngest member of the Dominican Symphony. He taught himself jazz with records by Oscar Peterson and Art Tatum, but, for years, the closest he came to seeing live jazz was his uncle's boogie-woogie.

When Camilo is at the piano, a simple melody opens into dense jazz architecture—tumultuous broken chords, dissonant two-handed runs, somersaults. His dexterity is often compared to Oscar Peterson's; his playing emits the same kind of light. For all its rhythmic overdrive—"after so many years in the orchestra, I can't help but hear big sounds"—there's a poignancy to his work. Some quiet's at hand, perhaps because of all that light.

Like D'Rivera and Ponce, Camilo continues to explore his roots. He has jazz symphonies to write—in Caribbean tones. □

BY ELIZABETH HANLY

From left, Camilo, D'Rivera, and Ponce. Grooming (Camilo, D'Rivera), Rodney Groves; (Ponce), Helene Macaulay.

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