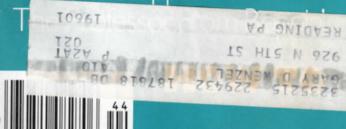
the contemporary music magazine

ALL-STAPS
-Crossover Or Die



MAX ROACH

Ain't No Stoppin'



JACK
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South Side To Woodstock

evelop a choir of drum sounds –

LOUIE BELLSON

Fania ALL-STARS

SALSA '78 - CROSSOVER OR DIE



left to right: Adalberto Santiago, Johnny Pacheco, Pete "El Conde" Rodriguez, Cheo Feliciano, Ishmael Miranda, Santos Colon, Ruben Blades.

The Fania All-Stars, salsa's most ambitious orchestra, celebrated their 10th anniversary in July of 1978 traditionally—by selling out Madison Square Garden and playing their contemporary big band Latin music, flavored by improvisation and age-old rhythms, without a trace of fusion.

"The whole world is going salsa!" exulted emcee Izzy Sanabria, publisher of *Latin New York* magazine and unabashed promoter of Latino soul music. "Cuba, Puerto Rico, *jibaro* Spain, Mexico! Las Estrellas de Fania!"

Striding into the spotlight to the roar of the well-primed crowd were the instrumentalists, all band leaders or favorite sidemen, who season the hot dance music that was thought to be breaking big in the '70s—bigger than the boogaloo in the '60s, bigger than the mambo in the '50s. Waiting in the wings were the smoothest, most passionate New York singers who vocalize in Spanish, including Pete "El Conde" Rodriguez, Adalberto Santiago, Santos Colon, Ishmael Miranda, Cheo Feliciano, Hector Lavoe, Ruben Blades, and the Queen of Salsa, Celia Cruz.

"Now the man who keeps them all jumping—" Sanabria cried, "the big gun of Fania Records—Johnny Pacheco!!" Out sprinted an angular figure in a form-fitting powder blue suit with white piping and fringe, waving to his audience then counting off a clavé, the typical five beat folkloric rhythm accented on the second or third stroke which underlies all Latin American music.

Young Papo Lucca's piano picked up the pattern over timbalist Nicky Marrero, congaist Johnny Rodriguez, and bongoist Roberto Roena. Sal Queras was there on standup electric bass. The trombones of Louis Kahn and Reinaldo Jorge harmonized with the three trumpets led by Louis "Perico" Ortizbass trumpet soloist Willie Colon awaited his special introduction. Multi-talented Pupi Legretta playing violin, sturdy tres player Yomo Toro, and vibist-arranger Louis Ramierez added to the texture. Schedules of their own working bands disrupted, the headliners who wax for Fania Records again collaborated to form a powerhouse band, putting on a fabulous show. Pacheco, the Santo Domingan-born composer, conductor, flutist, and vice president of Fania, America's most active salsa label, stoked the band as though shoveling coals into a furnace-and in a moment no one listening was able to sit still.

Though caught between rows of folding chairs and theater seats, an audience composed of all ages and all races was trying to dance. If the Fania All-Stars' goal was only to stimulate movement, they succeeded long ago, because the polyrhythms and overlapping melodic themes of their Latin American, Afro-Cuban music demand the adjective "infectious."

But Johnny Pacheco, his partner in Fania Jerry Masucci, the rest of the All-Stars and a widespread family of friends and business relations have had grander hopes for this aggregation. The band performs only a few times a year in already assured markets, and records at most twice every 12 months, so members can front their own creative projects. Yet the idea behind the All-Stars is that they sell the entire label, all the bands, singers, and salsa music, itself.

So Pacheco and Masucci aspire to a boundary-breaking crossover hit in the pop, r&b, or disco vein which will, they posit, lead to acceptance of Latin-rooted Spanish language music in the mainstream music market.

"You get a top ten album in the pop market and I guess that's what everyone is talking about, that's where it's all supposed to lead," says Masucci, who handles the business aspects of Fania Records while Pacheco oversees artistic considerations. In pursuit of that elusive breakthrough, Fania Records and the ever-changing band bearing its name signed a three year agreement with Columbia Records to co-produce an album a year, starting in 1976.

That year the Fania All-Stars made two albums, Delicate And Jumpy for Columbia with production help from Gene Page, and A Tribute To Tito Rodriguez for Fania, an in-house labor of love involving Masucci, Pacheco, Ramirez, and pianist-composer-arranger-



left to right: Johnny Pacheco, Louis "Perico" Ortiz, Adalberto Santiago.

CAROL FRIEDMAN

bandleader Larry Harlow.

"People were disappointed when we did the first Columbia record," Pacheco remembers. "Because there was no Latin music involved. So the Latin crowd got disappointed. That's why we started doing one side completely Latin, the other side the Columbia stuff. On the Latin radio programs we hear the Latin tunes played; on the American stations, the American stuff, although now they are starting to play the tune I wrote [for the All-Stars' latest, Spanish Fever], Coro Miyare. I heard it on 'BLS, here in New York. They play that because a lot of blacks listen to that station, and they go crazy for the music.

"I think mostly the same people buy Fania and Columbia albums, but we try to make the material different on each album. We have to give them a little mixture, because we want to get to the middle of the market. Maybe we can do a little crossover with a tune from Spanish Fever.

"If that goes big, maybe the people who buy it will listen to the second side, the Latin music. If they like that, maybe they'll go out and buy the other stuff, our own thing. On Fania records, there is crossover material for the American market, but from the Columbia records we expect more. I think you just have to give both kinds of music. Spanish Fever is selling more than the last one [Rhythm Machine] so I guess people are getting more into it. We try to make the Columbia records more American than the Fania records."

Live At The Red Garter, the first Fania recording of the All-Stars (issued in 1972), had crossover offerings: a duet version in English of Marvin Gaye's ballad If This World Was Mine, and a Memphis Horns-inspired Strut. But most of Red Garter (there are two volumes), which features, besides Pacheco, Colon and Harlow, the popular leaders Ray Barretto, Joe Bataan, Tito Puente and Eddie Palmieri, is a rough Latin jazz jam, with piercing trumpet breaks, several percussion solos, cliche-crushing pianistics, and discursive, improvised vocalizing over a simple phrase repeated by an impromptu chorus. There is the marvelous, funky feeling of music created in the heat of life.

By comparison, Spanish Fever opens with the title track: an "Ole" and some standard flamenco guitar licks by guest soloist Jay Berliner, a disco beat, guest Maynard Ferguson's trumpet break ending predictably on a squeezed high note, and a femme chorus mixed out front repeating the two key words of the title. All the potential of the recording studio supplants any spontaneity—and where are the Fania All-Stars?

Continuing through the disc: Que Pasa? uses Latin percussion, timbales and scraper, a couple characteristic measures by guest alto saxist David Sanborn, then the tune's title to frame guest Eric Gale's guitar solo. "Wha' hapen-ing?" sings the male chorus in bad dialect. Space Machine (Ride, Ride, Ride) makes the All-Stars indistinguishable from any other disco corporation but for Nicky Marrero's rolling sticks perking the beat. On Your Sereness ringer Hubert Laws blows a flawless (but not Latin) line, Sanborn gets another passage, and strings well into a fade-out.

Flip it over to hear some salsa: Pacheco's Coro Miyare opens with a pagan chant over an Afro-Cuban conga beat. Papo Lucca maintains perfect counterpoint syncopation with the chorus; an interesting trumpet line is developed by the section over a complex, clean and fast rhythm; a whistle intrudes irregularly, an amazing ascending orchestral motif turns the tune around, and there's a cutting, uncred-

ited trumpet solo, probably by "Perico" Ortiz.

Donde is a bi-lingual pop arrangement with more Latin ingredients than anything on the A side. Ishmael Miranda's feature Te Pareces A Juda (You're Like Judas) is a progressive Latin band piece, and Sin Tu Carino (Without Your Love) is a romantic lyric sung persuasively in Spanish by heartthrob Ruben Blades. Side two could appear on an entirely different album than side one, and perhaps some day it will. At Madison Square Garden the All-Stars performed all of side two except Donde, and nothing from side one at all.

The All-Stars' previous Columbia release, Rhythm Machine, is not so strictly segregated. The opening track, Ella Fue (She Was The One) is a fusion attempt similar to Donde, with guest guitarist Gale soloing, but En Orbita sounds like the All-Stars, and bassist Bobby Valentin displays his remarkable chops over uncluttered percussion (the more amazing as Mongo Santamaria on congas joins Marrero and fast fingered Roena on this album). Executive producer Bob James takes a keyboard solo on Awake, and producer-arranger-conductor Jay Chattaway penned the samba Jubileo. But these are interspersed among Peanuts, a novelty arrangement reminiscent melodically of Santamaria's '60s Latin jazz, two more fusion cuts and the authentic Latin sound of Juan Pachanga, sung by Blades.

Chattaway, a youngish staff producer at Columbia, had worked on Maynard Ferguson's Conquistador and arranged Gato Barbieri's Caliente before assignment to the Fania project

"At an a&r meeting in California, someone noticed that Caliente was a Latin pick of the week in Billboard," Chattaway explains from his current office at Tappan Zee Records, which he heads with Bob James. "And May-

"I wrote an original samba-type song for the second album, and Rhythm Machine did well-retained a Latin sense, also got some pretty good reviews, and opened a few jazz ears to Latin jazz. The album was well recorded; for the first time you could hear bongos go wild. Columbia decided to go for another one. get into the r&b market and, even more, the established Latin market. Their aim was to get all star jazz talent, and all star Latin talent, to become a leader in the salsa market with the Fania All-Stars, and not to make it less Latin, necessarily.

"It's not the large conglomerate delving into this music. At Columbia we believe in diversifying, and are into the Latin thing as well." Chattaway was part of the Columbia tour of Cuba in May, 1978, which resulted in signing Irakere, the first Cuban jazz band to record in the U.S. since the Cuban Revolu-

Chattaway recently produced Mongo Santamaria. "I'm becoming the ethnic producer," Chattaway chuckles. "They think I can do this." But he has worked to learn the styles, listening to a collection of old Cuban records, RCA reissues, charanga (flute and violin) bands, studying Johnny Richards' Cuban Fire Suite written for Stan Kenton's orchestra, and finally confronting the idiosyncracies of his colleagues.

"We never quite get rehearsals," Chattaway says of the All-Stars recording dates, "and the albums are enormously expensive by some standards. There is a lot of playing to get the groove, to work out the arrangements-they do rhythm charts, but it would be impossible to notate some of the things they play. Then, sometimes, the melodies are the last things to be composed.

Sometimes they come in with a hot montuño type riff. Like Coro Miyare; we did the rhythm track before anyone had any idea what the melody might be. Pacheco came in with an African type coro that became the melody; we recorded the coro itself, alone, then decided to put African percussion on top of it. I wrote strings and horns on top of that, and it turned into a tribal thing, and a favorite commercially.

"Among the All-Stars, everybody contributes. They're into co-writing; songs are composed by committee, like one person would write the vocal part, Louie Ramirez would write a horn part and I would expand on it, make it a bit more contemporary. Ramirez is a pretty good player but a really good writer."

Chattaway denies the Columbia-Fania venture is disco-aimed. While perceiving that "most of the Latins are dance fans, not jazz fans," he's nonetheless cautious about going after the disco market, afraid the music will "lose something."

"But you can't write all your heavy stuff, either, or you'll scare everyone away," he worries. "It's a problem because radio is really the only way to make a record successful. You must choose the path of least resistance to get on the radio, then go for a crossover. Salsa songs are usually story oriented-but in case there's a turnoff with the Spanish language, we've had a tendency to have shorter catch phrases, and bi-lingual songs.

'So far the All-Stars on Columbia are better

sellers than their albums on Fania, but Columbia has a strong marketing arm. If Fania had Columbia's machinery, I'm sure they would do better. For the All-Stars, Columbia's first step in marketing is heavy into radio ads on Latin stations."

Chattaway has learned from the All-Stars.

"The rhythmic concept-I probably wouldn't want to write a samba if I hadn't heard the All-Stars. All their songs have a built-in clavé metronome, like a samba in a box, and that's why we called the one album Rhythm Machine.

"Every jazz artist tries to incorporate some Latin aspects in their music. I'm planning on eventually having Latin elements on my solo album for Tappan Zee. In the meantime, to hear an authentic Latin group play Latin music composed by an Anglo is a real treat. When you do funk music everything is straight up and down. Latin rhythms cover a much broader spectrum," Chattaway asserts.

Pacheco is aware that his music is filtering down through other musicians, and becoming influential. "I was very thrilled," he says ingenuously. "There were a lot of studio guys, American musicians, who told me they went to see us at the Garden because they dug the music. To see that kind of thing happening!

"There are lots of [non-Latin] guys who come to see the band just to watch. Then you see them when we get off the bandstand, they get on the conga and imitate what they've seen. There are some good guys around-who have all the records, and they try to learn Latin percussion by playing along with the records. Some of these guys who can play are working with Latin bands. And there are a lot of horn players now, who aren't Latin, playing with Latin bands."

Pacheco and most of the other Fania musicians learned their music directly from their

"I started playing when I came to the States; I was 11," Pacheco relates. "I picked up the music from records and from musicians around me, especially in my family. My father was a musician, a wind man, he played alto sax and woodwinds, and my uncle was a trumpet player, who started one of the first bands in Santo Domingo, called Santa Cecila. My flute playing comes from my father.

"I have a black ebony flute, a five key flute which is very antique and was made only in France, though I think in Germany they play it, too. It's played with the Meyer fingering

"A lot of our music is traditional. When we get the rhythm thing together, the only thing we put down is the rhythmic base, then we let the rhythm players do their own thing. Of course, there's a new generation of arrangers coming up, guys who have grown up listening to jazz, to rock, and the change is incredible. So far, it's better-they write 9th chords, and use different licks, and sometimes we blend in island things, like the meringe from Santo Domingo, the bomba from Puerto Rico; we might even add Mexican licks. So we have changed the sound, and that's why everybody digs itbecause they can identify with some part of

The upcoming arrangers include Ramirez, a lead trumpet player named Enrico Frise, pianist Lucca, bassist Valentin, and Sonny Bravo, pianist of Tipica '73. Fania also keeps up with the rising young players; Masucci regards bassist Sal Queras, newly add to the All-Stars, highly.

Masucci doubts deep roots are essential in the makeup of budding All-Stars.

Sometimes they're not even known, you know," he admits. "They come up with the right kind of sound and we have the experience and producers to work with them. And sometimes they're playing out there, and are well known on the dance circuit but without a record. Then we try to sign them. There's no set formula, and you never know; you just have to use your taste and hope you're right.'

Nor is age a factor. Nicky Marrero is only 27, but has been on the salsa scene for 12

"My uncle had a band, my brother plays guitar and bass a little, and I started playing professionally when I was 15," Marrero says. 'I learned percussion on my own. I got a set of timbales, practiced with tapes and records, and got into the congas, bongos, and traps afterwards." He's reinvesting his learning by teaching, along with Sonny Bravo, "Latin rhythm, theory, the whole works" at the East Harlem Free School Of Music, a program administered by Latin musician Johnny Colon.

'I've worked with every one of the All-Stars in the recording studio and on club dates. We in the All-Stars have good communication; everybody works together, nobody gets in anyone's way. As for Tipica '73, I've been with them three years. We met in New York. I had been working with so many different bands, and was looking for a good position. The whole band is cooperative, the charts are out of sight, and being a member of it is the best thing that's happened to me so far.'

Marrero has contributed his own ideas to salsa percussion.

"The standard setup in orchestras is rhythm bell, cha cha bell, cymbal and timbales," he notes. "What I and others have done is add a bass drum, snare, tom, and maybe a hi hat."

Nicky plays standing up and he's a performer to watch. At the Garden he dressed in red boxing colors, with "Champ" stitched across the back of his dressing gown and gloves hanging from his waist. The climax of the show was the "surprise" appearance of Tito Puente, long regarded as Latin jazz's top timbales player-Tito and Marrero engaged in a furious timbales duel, and ended in a draw.

"Wearing colors was friendly agitation, like in a cock fight," Marrero laughs. "We weren't fighting it out; on the contrary, there's a lot of love between us." Love perhaps borne of respect for a tradition, as Marerro avows, "We play folkloric rhythms; I've learned them by talking to the veterans to get the correct way of doing things. I get around, and personalitywise, I get along with all of them.

The sound of a music rooted in a folk culture generally evolves slowly, through the culture's absorption of individual variations, like Marrero's expanded timbales kit. Musicians such as Pacheco, a synthesizer with roots deep in tradition but an ear for the future, may be catalysts of development. But the pressure of the marketplace is speeding change at Fania.

The music has become much hipper, claims Masucci, who shares a composer credit on Juan Pachanga from the Rhythm Machine album. "More musical, more intricate, heavier arrangements. New experiments, you know? Actually, that's what the All-Stars albums on \$\gamma\$ Columbia have been; on each album we try to experiment with mixing different sounds and we also keep a few tunes with our basic roots. Everything is about trying to keep roots and branch out at the same time. And every album we've put out on Columbia has doubled sales

from the previous one."

Masucci is outwardly confident about the future, though Columbia's commitment to the Fania All-Stars is up for renewal. He reports that Pacheco has already started on a new album with the All-Stars for '79 release. Chattaway, too, believes the labels' association is secure: "The commitment will surely continue, because the records are making money," Chattaway says.

Still, rumors abound that the All-Stars sales history has fallen below Columbia's expectations. Fania itself has tapes in the can which it would release were the agreement with Columbia dissolved, but '78 has been a slow year for salsa generally, according to a recent Bill-board article headlined "Salsa Sales Plummeting." It quoted an anonymous record company executive: "While the Spanish speaking audience, according to our surveys, still outnumbers the fully bi-lingual and primarily English components of the Latin audience, the shift in favor of English has already begun and should be complete across the U.S. within the next three years."

Will Columbia, a major label and a powerful musical force in the marketplace, be patient for three more years, awaiting the evolution of a folkloric music, or will it try to hasten the trend? Perhaps an English-singing Latino artist will make the breakthrough outside of the salsa tradition, as Carlos Santana did. If salsa's success is predicated upon English language lyrics, what will become of the vocal improvisation which singers of salsa have refined to such a high art that their utterances are expressive beyond language lines?

Will salsa enthusiasts hold their breath until the '80s, satisfied with pale imitations while the music of tradition lapses back into barrio anonymity? The All-Stars, after all, had few Stateside performances in 1978. After the Garden, a July 4th date at Belmont Park racetrack, and two West Coast gigs they headed for Venezuela, where a rapidly growing audience will see Pacheco tour with his own small band, abetted by Celia Cruz, this autumn.

Has salsa's popularity peaked, or is it still growing?

"Let me tell you this," offers Jerry Masucci, "what didn't happen, we haven't had any pop hits. Everyone's looking for it. But as far as growth, as far as sales, and as far as personal appearances goes, it just keeps getting bigger and bigger. This year we sold out the Garden again. The music is sweeping across South America, and even creeping into Mexico, which is very nationalistic. So it's growing one way or another."

Will Latin music continue to gain expo-

"I think so," says Johnny Pacheco. "In the past the old guys really stuck to one thing only. We're more flexible now. If a trend is on the way, we try to put a little flavor of it in there. We're not so strict. We're definitely reaching more non-Spanish speakers with the All-Stars, through Columbia—they're doing a hell of a job reaching certain elements we couldn't get to through Fania.

"You know, Europe is a little slow yet. But we did a concert at the Lyceum in London, and we sold out, and people flipped out. There were a lot of kids from Puerto Rico in the Army over there, and they started dancing, and the English, when they saw that, tried to imitate them. Well, they had a ball."

and I'd be playing the tympani. I was into anything I could possibly find.

And young drummers should get involved in music theory, keyboard harmony mainly. Keyboard harmony teaches you about music itself and how to deal with the sound of other instruments.

After you've absorbed all that, then don't listen to anything but yourself. For awhile, after you've got all that together, then you look for your own individual personality. After you've saturated yourself on all this other stuff, and you're satisfied with yourself there, then you don't listen to anything, you seek yourself out, which is the hardest part of it. Develop your own individuality. One of the most difficult things for all human beings, because of our condition, is to accept what we are, the way we look, the way we talk, the way we walk, especially the way we sound. You have a tendency to listen to your first recording and you want to hide when somebody says, "Hey, I want to play this for you, you're on it." I don't want to hear it! That's just a tendency. We criticize ourselves. That all comes from

Our education system is so goddamn one dimensional, at times it's Germanic. Although we may come out of an American university with a doctorate, when we go to a culture outside of the standard Germanic cultures, we're just like the most naive people in the world. We criticize the way other people sleep, eat and what the hell kind of music is that you're playing on those metal instruments! The first time I went to Japan it was, Jesus Christ, what kind of bathroom is this? What is this sleeping without a bed? Raw fish? I remember I went to Sweden, I couldn't read the menu, I was out by myself at a restaurant and I saw Stake. I said, OK. I was trying to be sophisticated but after it, it had the word Tartare, which is raw meat. Now I never eat raw meat! They probably knew I was an American. I said, "Would you please take this back and cook it for me.' Later on, I found out you just don't do things like that. But I'd never seen that. It wasn't a familiar thing in my environment.

I'm saying our educational system doesn't prepare us, many times, to deal with that part of us that would open us up. The system says you got to be an "A," otherwise you're wrong. It's a difficult thing to criticize because, being in education, you see a lot of things. But we frighten students to death. You should do the ultimate you possibly can, but at the same time you're not supposed to inhibit a person so that he's afraid to make a mistake. Students, young musicians, young drummers, should not be afraid of that.

Just take everything in and after you do that, then shut everything out and go for yourself. And that's good advice, not only for drummers but for anybody who is trying to develop some kind of personality that's identifiable only to them. Be strong and brave enough to stand up and say, "It's me!" If they want to throw tomatoes at you, stand up and take it. If they throw flowers and money at you, take that too. But don't be afraid of saying, "Oh shit, it didn't make it with the public that time." Take that and keep right on going. So it isn't easy, but it's a lot of fun trying to do it.

Primack: What are your thoughts on the tremendous popularity of artists like George Benson?

Roach: I think it's all relative, really.

George is such a fantastic musician, such a great guitarist. He reminds me of King Cole in a sense. King Cole was such a fine pianist. The way Benson sings, he sounds like a cross between maybe Stevie Wonder and someone else. But when he does sing, he's very musical with it and that comes from the fact that he's such a fine instrumentalist, a musician in general. What Stanley Turrentine, Freddie Hubbard and them are doing . . . I hear rumors sometime that they're unhappy with it, but they're making money. They're happy with the capitalistic society. Your success in the arts is measured by the acceptance that you get publicly. They still are playing, though. Stanley blew that way when he was working with my group, he sounded like that then.

Now I don't have much respect for a player like Sonny Rollins, who now all of a sudden because a record company executive tells him to coattail on this kind of groove, he plays it. He's playing the intelligence of the public cheaply. For him to say now I'm going to be a Stanley Turrentine because somebody told him to. Stanley's like that honestly. When he was with me, he sounded like that, big and bold, not as complex as a Sonny Rollins. For Sonny to do that, it's like someone insulting your intelligence. I don't know whether Sonny realizes that or not, whether Orrin Keepnews does or not. I don't have any respect for that. Sonny can get into it if he likes. It would be like if Basie's band all of a sudden turned into Maynard's style because Maynard was selling a lot of records. It would sound strange to me. It would be like, is Basie trying to bullshit me? That kind of thing I don't quite dig. I really don't. That's insulting. I don't think he's making that kind of money either. I really don't think Sonny comes out honest and sincere.

Mingus is trying to do the same kind of thing. I don't think they're going to sell as many records as Fleetwood Mac and that crowd. They're bad, those guys, honestly. They don't even attempt to do the things that Mingus and Sonny are doing, they're where they are and they do whatever they do well and they're handling it businesswise and using all their smarts. They're certainly not letting people take advantage of them.

Primack: What young players do you respect?

Roach: Well, there's a young saxophonist, Sulieman Hakim. I like him very much. I think he's going to be significant. He's a hard worker. He came up to the university but he's in Europe right now. But they're all across the country. You know, one thing about this music is the fluidity of it. Although I could name people, I know this music allows each generation to produce. It's not like traditional European fare, or traditional Indian music where things have to be this way and the people of coming generations will never have a chance to be heard because they can never get past the Bachs and the morning, noonday and evening music of India. This is why I think this music is so infectious all over the world. A lot of people are engaged in it. Because we had a Coleman Hawkins didn't mean we couldn't have a Lester Young and then on up to a Charlie Parker or a John Coltrane. Because we had a Louis Armstrong didn't mean we couldn't have a Dizzy, a Miles or a Freddie Hubbard. So this music has always allowed every generation to function. We got Ray Charles and Stevie Wonder and I know there's going to be more all on down the line. .

Primack: But nobody's really come along