

ARECIBO AT PERO LOUNGE

by Conrad Gayle, Jazz Blogger for "Toronto: My Kind of Town"

Last month, on July 8th at Toronto's Pero Lounge I had the opportunity to check out a fantastic new group, but hadn't had the time to post this article I wrote then. Here it is now:

After dining on Chinese cuisine in Chinatown on a Friday night (July 8th, 2011), I decided to take a nice long stroll to Pero Lounge to hear some live jazz. The band featured is an exciting new Latin-jazz outfit called "Arecibo".

This band features the talents of the man often heralded as "Canada's preeminent jazz trumpet player" and multiple National Jazz Award winner Brownman Ali (from Guru's Jazzmatazz, Cruzao, Brownman Electric Trio), five-time National Jazz Award Pianist of the year Dave Restivo (from Rob McConnell's Boss Brass), El Salvadorian much in demand latin bassist Ruddy Bolanos (from Ricky Franco, Cache) and drummer/percussionist extraordinaire Max Senitt (currently touring with Alex Cuba). With a potent lineup, they have delivered some of the most rhythmic, challenging, and explosive Latin-jazz sounds that I have ever heard, reminiscing the great Latin-jazz sounds of Jerry Gonzalez and the Fort Apache band which this band is modeled after.

Arecibo gets its name from the radio telescope housed in Puerto Rico, which is known for being the largest in the world and responsible for great achievements in space exploration. This band has the ability to live up to it's exploratory name by taking classic jazz standards (Miles Davis' "Seven Steps to Heaven"; Horace Silver's "Song For My Father") and Latin-jazz classics (Mongo Santamaria's "Afro Blue") in order to bring such world class grooves and improvisations that takes the music into territories unknown to mankind.

Brownman Ali does it again being the great mastermind of creating bands as vehicles for his creative output. His unbridled versatility always pays huge dividends when he adapts and integrates his own unique jazz voice to straight ahead jazz, funk, hip-hop and Latin sounds, and this quartet is yet another example of his chameleon like abilities to fit into any mode of music. In Arecibo he has assembled a great band that brings all 4 of the aforementioned elements together into a sound that - like the trumpet player himself - is one-of-a-kind with it's own special identity. His trumpet playing is full of fire, life, and vivacity. As I watch him play I feel pride in the fact that he is often considered Canada's answer to another great trumpeter and innovator -- Miles Davis. Though Brownman's own energized playing style is significantly different from Miles, his similarly driving need to push the envelope of the idioms he makes music in is always evident. This night was no exception. Even Brownman's percussion skills are to be commended, since he displays great rhythm, time, and sheer ability to creatively play with rhythms while sounding intricate and complimentary at the same time.

Dave Restivo is one of my own favourite piano players and one of the best Canada has ever produced. Whether he is playing with his own trio or in other bands, this is a pianist definitely worth checking out when the opportunity presents itself. He even shows his adaptability to the Latin-jazz idiom with his ability to create rhythmic solos resounding with clave and montunos that engage. His ability to engross himself in deep communication among the remaining members of the quartet while soloing is dazzling to watch.

Ruddy Bolanos has a thick, potent bass tone that always delivered a strong time feel even when complex polyrhythms were on display inside the ensemble. I enjoyed talking with him during intermission, he is a very nice gentleman and an artist I really need check out further in the Latin scene.

I bet you Max Senitt's parents named him after jazz drummer/percussionist extraordinaire Max Roach. Max at a young age shows great knowledge and skill of the Latin-jazz idiom, due to playing in various Latin groups over the years (including Hilario Duran's trio and Brownman's own Cruzao, Cruzao Grupo Monstruoso & Marron Matizado). He also leads his own Latin-jazz group called "Max Senitt y sus Amigos". He is one of my favourite drummers to listen to, and is also a great music teacher, family man, and good friend. Max Senitt is another musician to watch out for when the opportunity presents itself in Toronto.

It was a great night of Latin-jazz at its most advanced and creative, and I am sure that this is not the last that we hear of Arecibo for months and years to come.

[Editor's note: I just found out that Arecibo is playing Pero Lounge again on Fri-Aug-19, with the luminous Mark Kelso (from Hilario Duran's Trio) on drums and Canada's most acclaimed Latin bassist Paco Luviano on bass! See you there!]

Arecibo website:

www.Arecibo.Brownman.com

Brownman Official Web Site:

www.Brownman.com

Dave Restivo MySpace:

www.MySpace.com/DaveRestivo

Max Senitt Official Web Site:

www.MaxSenitt.com

Pero Lounge Web Site:

www.PeroLounge.com