

BOOKLET



BEFORE DELVING INTO THE PARTICULARS OF THIS MAGICAL MULTI-DIRECTIONAL ENCOUNTER BETWEEN THREE OF THE MOST PROFICIENT, ARTFUL AND INSPIRED MUSICIANS WHO EVER IMPROVISED ON THEIR RESPECTIVE INSTRUMENTS, LET'S TRACE THE BACK STORY.

IT BEGINS IN MAY 1991, WHEN GONZALO RUBALCABA, TWO WEEKS SHY OF 28, RECORDED THE BLESSING — HIS SECOND ALBUM FOR SOMETHIN'ELSE, WHICH LICENSED THE MUSIC TO ITS SISTER LABEL, BLUE NOTE — WITH BASSIST CHARLIE HADEN (WHO HAD BROUGHT HIM TO ATTENTION OF BLUE NOTE HEAD BRUCE LUNDVALL) AND DRUMMER JACK DEJOHNETTE. THE PROCEEDINGS TRANSPIRED AT TORONTO'S MCCLEAR STUDIOS, AS POLITICAL OBSTACLES MADE IT COMPLICATED FOR RUBALCABA — WHO HAD RECENTLY MOVED TO THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC FROM HAVANA, HIS HOMETOWN — TO PERFORM OR RECORD IN THE UNITED STATES. THAT AUGUST, THREE MONTHS LATER, BLUE NOTE BROUGHT RUBALCABA TO THE MOUNT FUJI JAZZ FESTIVAL FOR A CONCERT WITH DEJOHNETTE AND BASSIST JOHN PATTUCCI, SUBSEQUENTLY RELEASED AS LIVE AT MT. FUJI. SINCE THEN, RUBALCABA-DEJOHNETTE MUSICAL ENCOUNTERS HAVE BEEN SPORADIC, ALTHOUGH THEY'VE REMAINED FRIENDS AND NOT INFREQUENTLY CROSSED PATHS.

IN 1992, RUBALCABA DOCUMENTED HIS CUBAN QUARTET IN STUDIOS IN MADRID AND NAGANO, JAPAN. THEN, IN DECEMBER 1993, RUBALCABA RETURNED TO MCCLEAR STUDIOS WITH THE NONPAREIL BASSIST — AND SOMETHIN'ELSE LABEL-MATE — RON CARTER AND CUBAN DRUMMER JULIO BARRETO TO RECORD A PROGRAM OF BEBOP SONGS, RELEASED ON THE ALBUM DIZ. RUBALCABA BRIEFLY TOURED WITH THE CARTER-BARRETO TRIO THE FOLLOWING JANUARY, AND SIDE MANNED ON CARTER'S 1995 QUINTET ALBUM MR. BOW-TIE, SWUNG BY DRUMMER LEWIS NASH. NEITHER HE NOR THE DETROIT-BORN BASS MAESTRO RECALL SHARING A BANDSTAND SINCE THEN.

BOTH VETERANS WERE DEEPLY IMPRESSED. "GREAT RHYTHM PLAYER", CARTER RECALLED THINKING OF RUBALCABA AT THE TIME, "HE PLAYED THE FULL RANGE OF THE PIANO WITH A GREAT PIANO SOUND; HE SOUNDED GOOD WITH THE PIANO LID ALL THE WAY UP OR ALL THE WAY DOWN. I LIKED THE WAY HE USED THE PEDALS TO HELP HIM SUSTAIN NOTES OR PARTIALLY MUTE THE EDGE OF THE VOLUME — OR USED THE PEDAL TO HELP TO FADE OUT. THAT KIND OF PIANO SKILL".

"RHYTHMICALLY HE WAS AMAZING", DEJOHNETTE COSIGNS. "HARMONICALLY, TOO. HE HAD A LOT OF TECHNIQUE. SOMETIMES THE TECHNIQUE WOULD RUIN HIS IDEAS, BUT IN GENERAL HE HAD THAT UNDER CONTROL. HE RECEIVED POSITIVE, CONSTRUCTIVE SUGGESTIONS ABOUT USING SPACE: ON ONE TAKE I THINK I SUGGESTED HE PLAY LESS NOTES — AND IT CAME OUT A GOOD TAKE. IT WAS A LOT OF FUN TO PLAY WITH HIM".

RUBALCABA CONSIDERS THESE EARLY CONNECTIONS WITH CARTER AND DEJOHNETTE — AS WELL AS HADEN, PATITUCCI AND JOE LOVANO — TO BE HIS "REAL SCHOOL", HIS PORTAL TO A "DIFFERENT RELATIONSHIP" WITH AMERICAN MUSICIANS AND AMERICAN MUSIC, "WHAT INITIALLY PUT ME IN ORBIT WITH JAZZ WAS HOW IMPORTANT IMPROVISATION IS AS A MAIN SECTION OF THE PIECE", HE SAYS, "WHEN I HEARD ART TATUM, OR BENNY GOODMIN WITH TEDDY WILSON, OR CHARLIE PARKER, I FELL IN LOVE WITH THE INTERCHANGE BETWEEN THE MUSICIANS — HOW THEY INTERACT, HOW THEY FOLLOW EACH OTHER AND CREATE ANOTHER STORY, AS THOUGH THEY COMPOSED ANOTHER PIECE, CONNECTED BUT IN DISTINCTION TO WHAT THEY'RE PLAYING, BUT EVEN THOUGH I'D THOUGHT I KNEW SOMETHING ABOUT THE AMERICAN JAZZ TRADITION FROM HEARING RECORDS ON THE RADIO AND FROM MY FATHER WHEN I WAS LIVING IN CUBA, I REALIZED THAT I DIDN'T UNDERSTAND MANY THINGS, HOW DID THEY DEVELOP THIS SPEECH AND ARRIVE AT IT? HOW DID THEY DEVELOP THEIR IMAGINATION IN PLAYING HARMONIES AND CHORDS? HOW DID THE BASS PLAYER CONCLUDE THAT THIS IS THE LINE HE SHOULD DO BEHIND THE SAXOPHONE PLAYER'S SPEECH? WHAT SIGN GIVES THEM THE GREEN LIGHT TO GO IN THIS WAY AND TO DO THAT? THEN WITH TIME, I UNDERSTOOD THAT IT WASN'T ONLY ABOUT SPIRITUALITY, INSTINCT. A CONVERSATION".

HE ADDS THAT "DEEP AND DIRECT INTERACTION" WITH THE AFOREMENTIONED MASTERS "TOLD ME THAT I HAD TO START FROM ZERO", NOT ONLY GLEANING INFORMATION FROM THEIR REAL TIME PLAYING, BUT ALSO ABSORBING THEIR ONSTAGE ACTIONS AND OFFSTAGE REMARKS. "NOT ONE OF THEM EVER SAID, "YOU MUST PLAY LIKE THIS OR THAT". I UNDERSTOOD THAT I HAD TO LISTEN AND REALIZE THAT WHAT THEY WERE DOING WOULD CHANGE WHAT I DO FOR THE BETTER. ONE THING WAS THE WAY THEY USED SPACE IN THE MUSIC, WHICH I ALREADY KNEW I HAD TO WORK ON. AND THEN THE VOCABULARY—INTENTIONS, DICTION, THE DESIGN OF MELODIC LINES, THE RHYTHM INSIDE THE LINES, THE PHRASES, THEY ALSO GUIDED ME TO THINGS I SHOULD HEAR FROM THE PAST. "LISTEN TO THIS RECORD, MAYBE NOT THE ONE THIS GUY DID IN THE STUDIO, BUT THIS LIVE DATE HE DID WITH THE SAME MUSIC, AND SEE HOW IT TRANSFORMED. THAT HAPPENED A LOT WITH MILES" RECORDS FROM THE 1960S. JOE WOULD TELL ME TO CHECK A CERTAIN PIECE FOR THE WAY SOMEONE ACCOMPANIES ON THE PIANO: OR HOW HE TRANSFORMED THE HARMONY ON THE SECOND PART TO GIVE THAT SECTION A DIFFERENT HARMONIC VIEW.

"I HAD THE SMARTEST PEOPLE AROUND ME, AND THEY WERE ALWAYS OPEN TO OFFERING EVERYTHING THEY KNOW. I APPRECIATED THAT THEY TOOK THE TIME. IT WAS VERY POSSIBLE FOR THEM NOT TO PLAY WITH ME — THERE WERE A LOT OF PEOPLE OUT THERE. BUT EVERY TIME I OR MY MANAGER OR THE RECORD COMPANY ASKED THEM TO BE PART OF MY PROJECT, THEY AGREED. TO ME, THAT WAS A BLESSING".

SKYLINE TRIO STEMS FROM RUBALCABA'S LONG-STANDING AMBITION TO REUNITE WITH THE MENTORS OF HIS YOUTH. IT'S HIS EIGHTH ALBUM ON 5PASSION RECORDS, THE IMPRINT LABEL THAT HE LAUNCHED WITH THE 2010 SOLO PIANO ALBUM FÉ, AND THE FIRST OF A TRILOGY OF TRIO ENCOUNTERS INTENDED FOR RELEASE IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

"I'M LUCKY THAT BOTH RON AND JACK SAID YES", RUBALCABA SAYS. "THEY ARE VERY DIFFERENT PERSONALITIES, WHICH I MENTION BECAUSE COMING INTO THE STUDIO WITH THEM — OR TOURING OR PLAYING A LIVE CONCERT — IS NOT ONLY A MATTER OF PLAYING TOGETHER BUT LIVING TOGETHER HUMANLY IN THE MOMENT, RON HAS A HUMOR THAT IS UNIQUE TO HIM; I THINK OF HIM ALMOST AS AN ENGLISH GUY, EVEN IN THE WAY HE DRESSES, JACK IS A STORYTELLER; HE LOVES TO TELL STORIES ABOUT EVERYTHING — NOT ONLY MUSIC. ALL THESE FACTORS — THE ELEGANCE, THE ELOQUENCE, THE SMARTS, THEIR SOLUTIONS TO CERTAIN HARMONIC AND RHYTHMIC MOMENTS — YOU CAN HEAR IN THE WAY WE PLAY TOGETHER. WE HAD A FOUR-HOUR REHEARSAL AT AVATAR STUDIOS, AND THEN RECORDED THE MUSIC IN TWO DAYS".

HE WAS ADAMANT FROM THE ONSET THAT HE WANTED THE RECITAL TO BE "NOT A GONZALO RECORD, NOT TO DO THINGS ONLY IN MY WAY, BUT COLLECTIVELY, WHERE WE CREATE A CONVERSATION FROM MULTIPLE POINTS OF VIEW." TOWARDS THAT EQUILATERAL TRIANGLE AESTHETIC, HE ASKED CARTER TO REPRESENT HIMSELF WITH THE ORIGINAL SONGS "GYPSY", FROM CARTER'S 1979 ALBUM, PARADE, AND "A QUIET PLACE", FROM CARTER'S A SONG FOR YOU (1978). HE ASKED DEJOHNETTE TO BRING "SILVER HOLLOW", WIGHT DEJOHNETTE HAD FAMOUSLY RECORDED IN 1978 FOR ECM WITH HIS NEW WITH BUT AND ASKED DEJOHNET BOWIE, JOHN ABERCROMBIE, EDDIE GOMEZ); IN 1990 WITH PAT METHENY, HERBIE HANCOCK AND DAVE HOLLAND; AND IN 1991 WITH RUBBALCABA ON THE BLESSING. HE ALSO REQUESTED "AHMAD THE TERRIBLE", DEJOHNETTE STONE-PARALLEL TO AHMAD JAMAL, TO WHOM DEJOHNETTE PAID CLOSE ATTENTION DURING HIS FORMATIVE YEARS IN CHICAGO, WHEN HE HIMSELF WAS A GIGGING PIANIST.

RUBALCABA'S ORIGINALS ARE "PROMENADE" — A DEDICATION TO CARTER THAT DEBUTED ON INNER VOYAGE (1998-BLUE NOTE) WITH THE LATE BASSIST JEFF CHAMBERS AND DRUMMER IGNACIO BERROA — AND "SIEMPRE MARIA", A "TOTALLY REHARMONIZED" AND RESTRUCTURED ARRANGEMENT OF A BALLAD/BOLERO THAT APPEARED ON THE 1992 SOMETHIN'ELSE/BLUE NOTE ALBUM, SUITE 4 Y 20, WITH THE CUBAN QUARTET, AND A SOLO RECITAL RELEASED ON CUBA'S EGREM LABEL IN 2000. HE ALSO CONTRIBUTES THE CUBAN STANDARDS "NOVIA MÍA", A FILIN-ERA BOLERO COMPOSED BY JOSÉ ANTONIO MÉNDEZ WHOSE INTERPRETERS INCLUDE, AMONG OTHERS, PABLO MILANES, AND "LÁGRIMAS NEGRAS", AN ICONIC BOLERO-SON FROM THE 20'S THAT RUBALCABA PLAYS WITH CUBAN CHANTEUSE AYMÉE NUVIOLA ON THE 2020 RELEASE VIENTO Y TIEMPO,

PEGA

"I AM CONVINCED OF THE MANY SIMILARITIES BETWEEN CUBAN MUSIC AND JAZZ", RUBALCABA SAYS. "WE CALL 'NOVIA MÍA' A BOLERO, BUT IT IS A BALLAD. IN THE CASE OF 'LÁGRIMAS NEGRAS,' I WAS CURIOUS TO HEAR IT WITH A RHYTHM SECTION NOT FROM CUBA. I NEVER ASKED THEM TO DO ANYTHING RELATED TO EMULATING ANY CUBAN RHYTHM OR ANY SPECIFIC WAY TO PLAY THE BASSLINE BEHIND THE MELODY OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT, I JUST GAVE THEM THE CHARTS, AND SAID, 'THIS IS A VERY OLD TUNE WITH LYRICS, WELL KNOWN IN MANY PLACES AROUND THE WORLD — BUT FORGET ABOUT EVERYTHING; IT'S LIKE WE ARE CREATING THE PIECE RIGHT NOW.' I AM EXTREMELY HAPPY WITH THE RESULT, BECAUSE STILL YOU CAN RECOGNIZE THAT IT IS THIS PIECE".

ASKED ABOUT THE CHALLENGE OF NAVIGATING THE AFRO-CUBAN CODES ON THE BASS, CARTER REMARKED: "THE RHYTHM IS COMPLETELY DIFFERENT THAN LATIN RHYTHMS AS I KNOW THEM, BRAZILIAN RHYTHMS AS I HAVE TRIED TO PLAY THEM, AND BEBOP QUARTER NOTES, EACH RHYTHM IS A LIFETIME STUDY, AND ALL I CAN HOPE TO DO IS SEE IF I CAN PICK UP ENQUEH DURING THE DATE TO SOUND LIKE I BELONG THERE, PLAYING THESE AMERICANIZED CUBAN RHYTHMS. ALL I CAN DO IS PLAY WHAT I THINK GONZALO NEEDS BEFORE I DECIDE TO INSERT MY PERSONALITY — IF THAT FITS HERE. HE'S GAMBLING THAT I'M GOING THE RIGHT WAY, AND HOPING THAT I CAN CATCH HIM. IF I CAN FIGURE OUT WHERE HE'S LEADING ME, I MIGHT PLAY THAT NOTE BEFORE HE ARRIVES".

APPROPRIATELY, THE HOUR-LONG SESSION CONCLUDES WITH A ROMPING BLUES, SPONTANEOUSLY GENERATED DURING A HIATUS WHILE ENGINEER JIM ANDERSON WAS ATTENDING TO A TECHNICAL ISSUE. "ONE OF US PLAYED A NOTE, AND THEN WE FOLLOWED THAT SOUND, THAT LINE, AND CONTINUED PLAYING FOR SEVEN MINUTES", RUBALCABA SAYS. "WE DIDN'T KNOW THAT JIM WAS RECORDINITLW ESTOPPED AND HE TOLD US". TITLED "RONJACKRUBA", THIS HAPPY ACCIDENT UPHOLOS THE HIGH STANDARD OF AN IMMERSIVE ALBUM THAT IS UNIQUE IN RUBALCABA'S DISCOGRAPHY FOR ITS UNENDINGLY DIALOGICAL QUALITY, IN WHICH NO TOPIC, IDEA OR MOTIF IS OFF-LIMITS FOR KINETIC, SOULFUL INVESTIGATION.

"I THINK ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT AND IMPORTANT THINGS FOR ANY ARTIST IS TO FIND YOUR OWN VOICE, FIND YOUR OWN WAY TO SAY
THE STORIES", RUBALCABA SAYS. "THIS IS OBVIOUS IN THE WAY THAT JACK SOUNDS; IN THE WAY THAT RON CARTER SOUNDS, AND THEY DID IT FROM THE VERY
BEGINNING, WHEN THEY WERE YOUNG. NO MATTER WHAT MUSIC YOU PUT IN THEIR HANDS, AT THE END THEY CONVERT THAT MUSIC INTO SOMETHING
PERSONAL, THAT TO ME HAS AN AMAZING VALUE,

"BUT AT THE SAME TIME, THEY UNDERSTAND THEIR FUNCTION AT EVERY MOMENT. YOU GO TO THE STUDIO BECAUSE SOMEONE CALLS YOU TO PARTICIPATE IN A PROJECT, OF COURSE, HE CALLED YOU TO HAVE YOUR SPIRITS AND YOUR SOULS THERE, BUT AT THE SAME TIME, HE HAS REQUESTS ABOUT THE MUSIC HE WANTS YOU TO PLAY AND HOW THAT MUSIC SHOULD BE STATED. SOME MUSICIANS ARE ABLE TO PRACTICE THOSE REQUESTS AT A VERY HIGH LEVEL, OTHER MUSICIANS ARE ABLE TO DO IT ONLY IN THE WAY THEY SEE IT. RON AND JACK KNOW HOW TO KEEP THEIR SOUND, THEIR SPIRIT, WHILE FULFILLING AT A VERY HIGH LEVEL YOUR REQUEST AS A PRODUCER, OR MUSICAL DIRECTOR OR COMPOSER. THEY COMBINE A SPECIAL TALENT AND A STRONG PERSONALITY WITH A HIGH LEVEL OF CONSCIOUSNESS OF RESPONSIBILITY — EVERYTHING TOGETHER".

TO SUM UP, LET'S TURN TO THE EXACTING CARTER, WHO HAD JUST LISTENED TO THE FINAL MIX THE DAY BEFORE WE SPOKE. "I'M AMAZED THAT WE GO INTO A DATE WHERE TWO OF THE THREE HAVE NO CONCEPT GOING IN, AND THE GUY WHO'S IN CHARGE HAS TO CONVINCE US THAT HIS WAY OF DOING THIS IS GOING TO BE OK", HE SAID. "HE HAS TO CONVINCE US THAT HIS MUSIC — WHICH GOES IN SO MANY DIRECTIONS — IS A GOOD CHOICE FOR THE BAND AND THAT HE'S PICKED THE RIGHT PARTNERS TO MAKE THIS PROJECT SUCCESSFUL AS HE VIEWS SUCCESSFUL, AND IT'S INTERESTING THAT, THREE YEARS AFTER WE MADE THE RECORD. EVERYTHING HOLDS UP".

TED PANKEN

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