

Michael Spiro/Wayne Wallace
La Orquesta Sinfonietta



CANTO AMÉRICA

In his writings in 1590, Father J. de Acosta recognized that the mixed breeds born in the New World were not Spanish, African or Amerindian but mixtures of all three. He referred to this newly created race as “Creole” (Spanish - Criollo). The origin of the word is the Latin word “crear,” meaning “to create.” Until the mid 1800’s, the word Creole primarily signified that a person was born in the New World. It did not refer to color or race.¹

The music of the Americas is an ongoing, heterogeneous narrative that stands as a defining parallel of latitudes for all people. Folkloric traditions and sacred rhythms merge with modern musical genres, creating new forms and energizing and connecting different cultures. Cultivated from the fields and nurtured in the streets and concert halls, the music is an intertwining roadmap of innumerable influences. The tonalities of the Middle East, the traditions of Africa and the Iberian Peninsula, indigenous New and Old World archetypes, colonialism, rebellion and religion: all of these elements contributed to the birth of countless syncretic forms as the eternal human need for self-expression manifested in the Americas.

The stories of our lives and beliefs are musically engraved in myriad performances of hymns, marches, cinquillos and tresillos, New Orleans second line music, bombas, waltzes, salsa, blues, sambas, boleros, plenas, rags, Bantú music, Yoruba music, Carabali music, merengues, brass bands throughout the Western Hemisphere, the spirit of Carnaval, coplas, villancicos, décimas, romances, negro spirituals, calypsos, jazz, son jarochos, danzas, tangos, mazurkas, cumbias, son joropos, tumba francesa . . . the list is endless, fascinating and illuminating.





On our numerous trips to Cuba, we have been inspired by the “genre inclusiveness” of the nation’s music. The classical string players in the Havana symphony play in popular dance bands and are eager to learn jazz theory and harmony; the top notch jazz players study and perform classical repertoire on a regular basis; and both the classical and jazz musicians have a deep knowledge of Afro-Cuban folkloric music. There are no apparent barriers between the styles, the musicians and the general public. It is just music! This effort has been a cathartic spark that continues to pull us onto a path of further exploration and discovery.

Traditional Latin American music always had firm and long established roots in the classical string tradition. However, as the music entered the 1970s, this aesthetic was somewhat discarded, and the majority of projects in the Latin Jazz genre focused on woodwinds, brass and rhythm section. *Canto América* and La Orquesta Sinfonietta (chamber orchestra) is our vision of the revitalization of the concept of a strong rhythmic base over which orchestral elements of European classical music are featured. Our foundation is very much a function of the African roots of New World music, and so West African-based percussion and grooves permeate the body of our work. Many of our tune titles and concepts originate from the toques (rhythms) and cantos (songs) to the orishas, the deities brought by the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria to the New World during the slave trade. Yet even when we use African traditional song and melody as source material for our arrangements, it is European harmony and instrumentation that completes the creole fabric of the music. After all, the music of the Americas is neither African nor European, but rather the many combinations of these musical cultures that have formed the musical polyglot of the Western Hemisphere.

Finally, the jazz improvisation aesthetic is an essential component to our music. It is the creative element that completes the *Canto América* paradigm.

Michael Spiro and Wayne Wallace, 2016

1. CANTO AMÉRICA

(Amanecer/Dawn) - Wayne Wallace

Our opening is an orchestral tone poem for the break of day and recognizes Osain, the Yoruba orisha of the forest.

A three bar ostinato between the double bass and 2nd violins is supported by an embedded percussion forest. The female voices (vox humana), 1st violins and cellos carry the main theme which is followed by interweaving sub-themes among the french horn, oboe, piano and flute.

Instrumentation- vox humana (2), violin (4), viola (2), cello (2), double bass, piano, french horn, flute, oboe, percussion forest.

Amanecer
Sans Serif

*You bleed on us with light
A beacon oh so bright
And yet we take for granted all the things
This land did look like when we stop
And look from bottom to top.
The beauty that we see
And that awe it brings to me.
I wonder how we miss
A spectacle like this.
For beauty you do make
When night becomes day break.*



BIG BAND HORNS ON AFRO BLUE

Eric Juberg, Jonah Tarver - alto sax

Sam Motter, Tonu Maas - tenor sax

Theo Simpson - bari sax

Rachel Rodgers - flute

Alexandra Signor, Joe Anderson, Iantheia Calhoun, Cean Robinson,

Kevin Wilson - trumpet

John Sorsen, Brennan Johns, Miro Sorber, Richard Marshall - trombone

STRING QUARTET ON OCHUN'S ROAD AND AFRO BLUE

Daniel Stein (principal), Min Ju Kim - violin

Tze Ying Wu - viola

Ethan Young - cello

PRODUCTION NOTES

Recorded by Jake Belser at Primary Sound Bloomington Indiana, Gary Mankin at Knob & Tube San Francisco CA and Gary Mankin at Megasonic Recording Oakland CA

Mixed and mastered by Gary Mankin at Knob & Tube San Francisco CA

Photography by Rafael Porto; Ann Marie Theis, assistant

Album design by fantabulousink.com

Album artwork by Marcus Gordon

Produced by Michael Spiro for Achó Fún Fún Music and Wayne Wallace for Walaco Music

Michael Spiro is a clinician/artist for L.P., Sabian cymbals, Vic Firth sticks and Remo drum heads

Wayne Wallace is a Conn-Selmer artist

This project was made possible by funding from the Institute for Advanced Study at Indiana University. Learn about the making of *Canto America*, see photos of the artists, watch interviews with Michael and Wayne and much more at patoisrecords.com.

Special thanks to Jake Belser and Gary Mankin for their dedication in helping bring this project to life. Thanks to the musicians for their talent and contributions, Dean Gwyn Richards and the faculty and staff of the Jacobs School of Music, Ann Braithwaite, Kate Smith, Jill Piedmont and the folks at IAS, Michael Aczon, Karen Aczon, Teresa Harper and Sheryl Lynn Thomas.

ORQUESTA SINFONIETTA

Michael Spiro - percussion all tracks/arrangements (2 through 8)
Wayne Wallace - trombone and euphonium/arrangements
Colin Douglas - trap drums/percussion (2 through 8)
David Belove -electric bass (2 through 8)
Murray Low - piano (2 through 8)
Jeremy Allen - double bass and fretless bass (1, 3, 7, 8 and 9)
Jamaal Baptiste - piano (8)
Christian Tumalan - piano (8)
Jesús Diaz - lead vocals (4 and 7)
Mike Mixtacki - vocals (4, 7 and 8 lead on 5)
Edgardo Cambón - vocals (2, 3 and 6), (pregones on 6)
Fito Reinoso - vocals (2, 3 and 6), (pregones on 6)
John Santos - vocals (2, 3 and 6)
Cecilia Engelhart - vox humana (1, 8 and 9)
Maria Marquez - vox humana (1, 8 and 9)
Joe Galvin - vocals (3, 4 and 8), percussion (4, 5, 6, 7 and 8)
Kristin Olson - vocals (3, 4 and 8), percussion (4, 5, 7 and 8)
Nate Johnson - vocals (8)
John Calloway - flute (2), (solos on 3 and 4)
Tom Walsh - alto sax (7 and 8)
Alexandra Signor - trumpet (5, 7 and 8)
Joe Anderson - trumpet and ewi (5, 7 and 8)
Brennan Johns - trombone/bass trombone/mellophone/french horn (1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8 and 9)
Steven Banks - clarinet and bass clarinet (3 and 7)
Gabe Young - oboe (1, 3, 7, 8 and 9)
Marco Nuñez - flute and alto flute (1, 3, 7, 8)
Matt Shugert - flute (3 and 7)
Daniel Stein (principal) **Charlene Kluegel, Maria Jose Romero, Nidhal Jebali** - violin (1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 9)
Yoni Gertner, Tze-Ying Wu - viola (1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 9)
Ethan Young, Brady Anderson - cello (1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 9)

2. LA PROPAGANDA DE HOY - Music by Wayne Wallace/Lyrics by Michael Spiro (Dedicated to the music and genius of Juan Formell.)

“La Propaganda de Hoy” is a tribute to the Cuban musical group Los Van Van and its recently deceased director, Juan Formell. It is a funky timba dance groove where the main theme is played by the strings and electric bass, interspersed with percussion solos.

The concept of uniting strings with driving percussion has long been a central component of Cuban popular music. The string orchestras of the colonial period were a vital part of the popular music of the Americas in general and of Latin America in particular. But as the music moved into the mid-20th century, the importance of the orchestral sound slowly but surely began to diminish. The use of an expanded rhythm section based around the drum set and in support of vocals and horns began to predominate throughout the hemisphere.

The use of strings became a rare element in a popular music arrangement. This was of course further accentuated with the creation of electric instruments in the latter half of the century, because in part strings were inaudible in comparison to the volume the rhythm section could create. The situation was compounded by the advent of the synthesizer which became a cost effective substitute for a live string section. There were of course some notable exceptions to this paradigm: the Cuban charangas of the 1950’s, the signature use of strings of the disco era and The Sound of Philadelphia by the great producer Thom Bell to name some of the more popular ones. But in general, the use of the string section became more of a lush “sweetening effect” than an active participant in the arrangement.

However, near the end of the 20th century, contemporary composers and arrangers began to take full advantage of all the musical elements at their disposal. In modern Cuban music, this concept is best exemplified by Los Van Van. Multi-faceted, genre-diverse, experimental but always danceable, the group’s instrumentation speaks to both tradition and innovation. Beginning with a charanga style line-up of flute, piano, string instruments and latin percussion at its core, leader Juan Formell included the drum set, electric bass, vocals, trombones, synthesizers and drum machines. The resulting sound was a unique combination of funk, son montuno, classical western European music, Cuban rumba and jazz.

With its all-encompassing sonic palate, La Propaganda de Hoy is a child of both this hemispheric musical evolution and the vision of Formell. The importance of the strings cannot be overstated as they assume both lead and accompanying roles. The drum set and percussion contribute as soloists in addition to rhythmically driving the song throughout the piece. The brass section plays a major role in the song's thematic development, and yet the song would not be complete without the voices of the coro (chorus) inviting everyone to the party:

*Traen los muchachos
La propaganda de hoy
Estan tocando con su bomba
Y con su máquina me voy*

*Traen los muchachos
La propaganda de hoy
Estan tocando con su bomba ¡cuidado!
Y con ellos me voy.*

The word *propaganda* in Spanish does not have the same connotation as it does in English. Instead it refers to publicity and promotion. We want to broadcast our project with this song and let everyone know, "The band has arrived to play with an irresistible groove that can't be denied!"

Instrumentation - vocals, electric bass, flute, piano, drum set, timbales, congas, percussion, trombones (4), violin (4), viola (2), cello (2).

"You have to tell it the long way. You have to tell about the people who make it, what they have inside them, what they're doing, what they're waiting for. Then you begin to understand."

Sidney Bechet

9. CANTO AMÉRICA (Puesta del Sol/Sunset) - Wayne Wallace

Patio

Jose Luis Borges

Con la tarde

*Se cansaron los dos o tres colores del
pátio.*

*Esta noche, la luna, el claro círculo,
no domina su espacio.
Patio, cielo encauzado.*

*El pátio es el declive
por el cual se derrama el cielo en la casa.*

*Serena,
la eternidad espera en la encrucijada de
estrellas.*

*Grato es vivir en la amistad oscura
de un zaguán, de una parra y de un aljibe.*

Instrumentation - vox humana (2), violin (4), viola (2), cello (2), double bass, piano, french horn (2), oboe (2), percussion forest.

*At evening,
they grow weary, the patio's three
colours.*

*Tonight, the moon, bright circle,
fails to dominate space.*

Patio, channel of sky.

*The patio is the slope
down which sky flows into the house.*

*Serene,
eternity waits at the crossroads of stars
It's pleasant to live in the friendly dark
of entrance-way, arbour and cistern*

¹ De Natura Novi Orbis, De promulgatione Evangelii apud Barbaros, sive De Procuranda Indorum salute; Historia natural y moral de las Indias. Father J. de Acosta

8. OCHUN'S ROAD (El Camino de Ochun, Traditional)

Arrangement by Michael Spiro & Wayne Wallace

Ochun is the Yoruba representation of female sensuality, fresh water, and all things sweet, golden and beautiful. As the coquette, she is considered the youngest of the orishas. She is nevertheless an extremely powerful deity and passionately protects her "children." She lives in the river where she can be found bathing and admiring her appearance. Many of her songs reflect both her beauty and her sweetness. As such, it has been a longtime wish to take a camino (sequence) of her songs and orchestrate it for the batá drums and a chamber orchestra.

Certainly the songs of the orishas have provided source material for many years for not only folkloric groups from Cuba but also for jazz and popular music groups including such artists as Celia Cruz, Tito Puente, and Irakere. More recently even some modern/classical composers have turned to Lukumí music for inspiration. However, rarely is there a musical opportunity to explore and arrange an entire tratado (a road of songs). This track is a modern version of what actually happens in a cabildo (sacred context) except that the chamber instruments replace the traditional role of the singers. The melody of each canto is played by each of the different instruments of the chamber group (oboe, violin, alto flute, cello and trombone) while the other voices then become the coro.

"Ochun's Road" begins with a rubato rezo and then moves into a slow and lilting feel for several cantos where the melody and orchestration predominate. As the arrangement moves into a more up-tempo and driving feel the rhythmic component of the songs begins to take center stage. This transition is completed with a combination of the full band and orchestra, and traditional Iyesa songs to Ochun become the vehicle for percussion-driven popular dance grooves.

"Maferefun Yalode!"

Instrumentation - vox humana (2), batá drums (3), congas, percussion, double bass, electric bass, piano, drum set, violin (2), viola, cello, oboe, alto flute, french horn, wagner tuba, trumpet (2), alto sax, trombone (3), vocals.

3. STARDUST (El Encanto) - Music by Hoagy Carmichael/Lyrics by Mitchell Parish

Additional lyrics by Michael Spiro

According to Hoagy Carmichael, the inspiration for Stardust came to him in 1927 while he was on the campus of his alma mater, Indiana University, in Bloomington, Indiana. He began whistling the tune and then rushed to the Book Nook, a popular student hangout, and continued composing. Carmichael said he was inspired by the improvisations of jazz cornetist Bix Beiderbecke, and he refined the melody over the course of the next several months.

The lush harmonies and wide ranging melody of Stardust provide a perfect vehicle for our adaptation as a danzón, the first form of popular Cuban music. El danzón originated in Matanzas, Cuba, in 1879 and is a definitive form of creole music. Like its musical counterpart ragtime, its form is generally either ABACD or ABAC, and its roots are found in Spanish, African and French music.

The early danzónes were played by wind-based ensembles called orquesta típicas. The instrumentation usually consisted of cornet, valve trombone, ophicleide, clarinets, violins and tympani. The music was generally played outdoors. By the beginning of the 20th century, it moved indoors into salons and dance halls, and by the 1930s, the lighter and more elegant sound of the charanga style emerged. The large wind ensemble was replaced by a smaller configuration of two violins, viola, cello, piano, double bass and flute. The timbales were created by the Cubans to replace the timpani, and the guiro (scraper) and the conga drum were then added to complete the percussion section. It was from this musical tradition that the ubiquitous dance form, el cha-cha-cha, emerged.

Our version of *Stardust* retains the classic danzón-cha instrumentation and form until the last section of the arrangement. We introduce the electric bass and the drum-set in the last mambo section and bring the music into the modern era.

The lyrics of the coro are:

Estoy soñando, soñando con tus lábios
Mirando hacia el cielo, tus ojos del encanto.

Since we began our tenure at Indiana University, our goal has been to “Canto Americanize” this classic American song. We humbly dedicate this arrangement to our colleagues at the Jacobs School of Music.

Instrumentation - vocals, conga, timbales, guiro, double bass, electric bass, drum set, piano, violin (4), viola (2), cello (2), flutes (2), oboe, clarinet, bass clarinet.

*“These products are popular with white and black audiences and they’re a good cure for the blues.”
So that kind of polychromatic New Orleans musical reality that we’re all so interested in is certainly present from the first documentation of New Orleans music on cylinders in 1891. That of course is something we could probably read back into the 18th century.”*

Bruce Raeburn

4. AFRO BLUE (Obatalá) - Mongo Santamaria

No song is more iconic within the latin jazz genre than Ramon “Mongo” Santamaria’s “Afro Blue.” It has been recorded by hundreds of artists and continues to be the definitive 12/8 rhythmic standard for all latin musicians. Nonetheless, there remains a surprising lack of knowledge about the piece and its origins. For example, many people think “Afro Blue” was written by the legendary jazz saxophonist John Coltrane. However, Mongo recorded his composition in 1959, four years before Coltrane’s version on *Live at Birdland*.

After returning to the original canto, the final section transitions to a different praise song for the great warrior. It gradually evolves from a funk drum set groove into a classic Afro-Cuban rhythmic style known as guiro, which features the chekere (beaded gourd) ensemble.

Stravinsky’s interaction with Spanish and Latin American modernism is a two-way street that still informs and inspires!

“I have learned throughout my life as a composer chiefly through my mistakes and pursuits of false assumptions, not by my exposure to founts of wisdom and knowledge.”

Igor Stravinsky

Instrumentation - vocals, batá drums (3), congas, chekere (3), electric bass, fretless bass, piano, drum set, violin (4), viola (2), cello (2), mellophone, trombone, trumpet, flutes (2), clarinet.

In *The Inca*, written in the early 1600’s, Garcilaso de la Vega referred to the origin of the word “criollo”:

*The name was invented by the Negroes. . . . They use it to mean a Negro born in the Indies, and they devised it to distinguish those who come from this side and were born in Guinea from those born in the New World. . . . The Spanish copied them by introducing this word to describe those born in the New World, and in this way both Spaniards and Guinea Negroes are called *criollo* if they were born in the New World.*

In his address to the Congress of Angostura in 1819, Venezuela's newly elected president, Simon Bolivar, helped to clarify America's racial heritage. "It is impossible to say to which human family we belong. Though our fathers had different origins, and we all have differently colored skins, this dissimilarity is of the greatest significance."

7. EL CALDERO DE OGUN (Traditional) - Arrangement Michael Spiro/ Wayne Wallace

*"Inspiration exists, but it has to find us working."
Pablo Picasso*

In the Yoruba religion, Ogun is the definitive warrior. He is a powerful orisha who works tirelessly in the forest at his forge, shaping all things metal. He never rests and is always portrayed as covered in the soot and sweat of his indefatigable efforts. Ogun's shrine is an iron cauldron filled with iron implements and tools. It is three legged, wrapped with a chain representing the link between Heaven and Earth. Throughout history, the cauldron has been a symbol of transmutation, germination and transformation and has held a magical significance in many cultures. Similar to Igor Stravinsky's The Rite of Spring, this arrangement is centered on the primal motivational forces in human consciousness. We see it as a metaphor for the multitude of musical genres that have arisen in the cultural development of the Americas.

The piece begins with rezos for Ogun, and then the orchestra enters as the coro over the batá drums. The second section remains in the folkloric tradition but with polytonal harmonies. Adding Colin Douglas on drum set and Murray Low on piano moves the piece into a modern jazz framework. The rhythmic off beats from the strings and winds are manifestations of Ogun's tireless work as the world's blacksmith and of the syncopated movements of his machete as he dances.

The electric and fretless basses are then featured together in a through-composed melody that takes us to the next canto for Ogun. The strings carry the main melody here, while the woodwinds and the brass play sub-themes and variations underneath it.

Perhaps more interesting, few people are aware that the melody and form of "Afro Blue" is deeply embedded in traditional Afro-Cuban folkloric music. Mongo was of Yoruban descent, and his composition is derived from specific songs and rhythms dedicated to Obatalá, the Yoruba orisha of wisdom, justice and peace. Our specific intent in this arrangement is to expose those musical components. We feature the batá drums, the singing in the language of the Lukumí (the Yoruba descendants in Cuba), and the bembé macagua drums as a way to musically "unmask" the depth of the African retentions of this historic composition.

We bring our arrangement into the 21st century with the use of orchestral concepts, polytonal harmony and both individual and collaborative improvisation.

Instrumentation - vocals, congas, batá drums (3), electric bass, percussion, piano, drum set, flute (2), sax section (5), trumpet section (5), trombone section (5), violins (2), viola, cello.

5. HISPANIOLA (Aganyú) - Wayne Wallace

As an affirmation of change, we pay homage to Aganyú, the orisha of volcanos and earthquakes. Aganyú is responsible for creating new land and wields a unique double axe with an anchor-like handle as his tool. Teaching us the importance of being strong, steady and level-headed, Aganyú supports us through the trials and the tribulations of life.

We have found that the traditional styles of a genre sow the seeds of inspiration and creation. Consisting of hybrid rhythmic patterns, this piece is non-folkloric and "reversed engineered." A synthesis of several African diasporic styles, it is a musical allegory to the dichotomy of the shared land of the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

Although we begin the piece with a rezo (sung prayer) and batá toque to this powerful orisha, there is a palpable shift once the drum set and hand percussion enter. They play a unique groove that consists of a serpentine "double time/half time/hip-hop" drum beat and the Haitian rhythm petro.

The violins and violas take a non-traditional role here. They are an integral part of the rhythm section and anchor the groove with a contrapuntal ostinato in a 7-9-8-8 pattern. By contrast, the cellos and electric bass play a tumbáo-like offbeat bass line in a 6-4-4 pattern. The melody is carried by both the trombone and the ewi (electric wind instrument).

Instrumentation – vocals, violin (4), viola (2), cello (2), piano, electric bass, trumpets (2), alto sax, trombone, ewi, batá drums (3), drum set, congas, timbales, percussion.

“Only during the French revolution the term “eruption” and the metaphor of the volcano is widely adopted by the revolutionaries. Like a volcano spreads unstoppable fires over the landscape also the revolution will spread a purifying fire over the nations, burning to ashes the old establishment and governments.”

David Bressan (Scientific American)

6. EL MEDICO - Music by Wayne Wallace/Lyrics by Michael Spiro

Affectionately nicknamed “the Doctor” by percussionist Pete Escovedo, Wayne Wallace has been known in the San Francisco Bay area music world by that name for decades. This is due to his ability to take almost any song and perform the perfect amount of musical “surgery” as an arranger, performer and composer. Entitling a tune “El Médico” seemed only appropriate!

This piece includes many different components of our musical tapestry. Most significantly it starts with a rumba guaguancó. There is arguably no more important form of music throughout Latin America than la rumba Cubana. Including some part of a guaguancó in this project was an imperative. The arrangement of the melody includes the cajón (wooden box) and the full band. It is a very modern approach to this quintessential folkloric style.

“El Médico” navigates through a variety of rhythms and styles, interweaving Western European counterpoint, jazz and modern Cuban dance grooves into one thematic whole. After the statement of the melody over the rumba, the tune becomes a charanga featuring coro/pregón (lead vocal). A jazzy guaguancó section showcases four different string solos followed by “the Doctor’s” trombone solo over a modern timba groove. The arrangement takes an unexpected turn and juxtaposes Baroque counterpoint with traditional Afro-Cuban percussion. The recapitulation of the melody leads to the ride out section where the dance party is in full effect!

Originally we composed décima style vocals (a Spanish poetic form utilized in traditional guaguancó) that intentionally championed bringing the strings to the musical foreground. As someone remarked upon hearing the tune for the first time, “It’s about time somebody said “Give the string section some!” We also wanted to lyrically reference our Indiana University ties and make sure the “Hoosieritos” would be dancing to this piece:

*Con el trombón y el violín
la melodía ya ‘ta formada.*

*Porque el cello tiene su swing
y con la clave está tocando.*

*Con Miguelito y su cajón
Los Hoosieritos están bailando.*

*Suenan las cuerdas con los cueros
La rumba m’está llamando.*

When our singers John, Fito and Edgardo came into the studio to record, they brought their soneo (ad-libbing) mindsets with them and the lyrics morphed into a simpler coro in order to leave room for their improvisations. We just had to introduce Wayne as “El Médico”, arriving with his trombone:

*Ya llegó El Médico
Con su trombón, El Walaco.*

Instrumentation - vocals, congas (2), percussion, cajón, timbales, electric bass, piano, drum set, trombone (4), violin (2), viola (2), cello.