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**BUENA VISTA
SOCIAL CLUB** *At*
Carnegie Hall
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*Opposite Page – Salvador Repilado, Eliades Ochoa, Compay Segundo,
Orlando ‘Cachaíto’ López, Ibrahim Ferrer (Carré Theatre, Amsterdam) –*



The New York Times 3rd July 1998, *Jon Pareles*

The Buena Vista Social Club basked in the latest wave of Cubaphilia when it performed on Wednesday night. The concert was more than a musical occasion. Musicians from Cuba in their 70's, 80's and 90's, some emerging from retirement, were making their United States debuts at no less than Carnegie Hall.

They had been rediscovered by an English recording company, World Circuit, and an American guitarist, Ry Cooder, who produced and played on their Grammy-winning album, "Buena Vista Social Club" (Nonesuch). Wim Wenders was filming the concert, and a largely non-Hispanic audience gave an uproarious welcome to songs that date back as far as the 1920's.

With the bittersweet delicacy of a classic bolero, the Buena Vista Social Club simultaneously celebrated the vitality and virtuosity of its musicians and

mourned the era they embody. The concert began with "Chan Chan", an elegiac, minor-key love song in an old rural style; it ended with "Silencio", a bolero with the singers Ibrahim Ferrer and Omara Portuondo dancing cheek to cheek. In a love song about an unforgettable old flame, the 91-year-old guitarist Compay Segundo sang, "Hoy represento el pasado" ("Today I represent the past").

Some of the featured musicians were side men for the great Cuban innovators of the 1940's and 1950's. Mr. Ferrer, who had been shining shoes for a living before the Buena Vista sessions in 1996, sang alongside Beny Moré; Rubén González, who had retired in 1991, played piano with Arsenio Rodríguez and with Enrique Jorrín. Working with members of a younger traditionalist group, Sierra Maestra, they preserve an era when Latin music was danceable but not frenetic, restrained yet puckish, and sensual but not blatant. Mr. Ferrer and Mr. Segundo sang with sweet, rounded tones, less cutting than current salsa singers, as the lyrics reveled in passion or reminisced about lost love.

The concert toured old Cuban styles: the son, with

its spider webs of fingerpicked guitars (partly lost in Carnegie Hall's acoustics), and the danzón, with an almost stealthy pace and, in Mr. González's hands, some grand Romantic piano flourishes. There were also ebullient cha-chas and mambos that turned into descargas (jam sessions).

Octavio Calderón and Manuel Mirabal made their trumpets beg and tease; Barbarito Torres, on the laoud (12-string lute), played whizzing lines and jabbing dissonant chords. Mr. Segundo's guitar solos were gleaming and languid, lazing behind the beat and then sprinting.

Mr. Cooder, the best-known musician to the United States audience, stayed discreetly in the back row onstage, now and then adding a hint of countryish guitar. He emerged to play alongside Mr. Segundo in the ragtime-flavored "Orgullecida", adding jazzy slide-guitar chords that suggested Western swing. In the bolero, "¿Y Tú Qué Has Hecho?", Mr. Segundo, who has spent his career singing second, or harmony, vocals, sang lead in a baritone full of ardor and authority. Mr. González was the group's most determined crowd pleaser, splashing across

the piano with two-handed chords, ending phrases with sweeping glissandos and quoting Liszt during a danzón. In one tune, he carried a solo up to the top of the keyboard and beyond, playing the air while the audience cheered.

The music was rich with tenderness and nostalgia, suggesting a world of tropical ease and pre-Revolutionary innocence. Part of Cuba's new appeal to the outside world is the notion, partly illusory, that its isolation has made it a time capsule, maintaining styles that have been overrun by hectic commerciality elsewhere. But these Cuban musicians, an apparition made possible by shifts in politics, ambition and taste, are not disappearing again. Mr. González, Mr. Ferrer and other core members of the Buena Vista Social Club will be touring the United States in the fall, keeping Cuba's past in the present.

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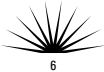


THE MUSICIANS

Octavio Calderón – trumpet
Joachim Cooder – drums, percussion
Ry Cooder – guitars
Angel 'Terry' Domech – congas
Ibrahim Ferrer – vocals
Roberto García – bongos, cowbell, güiro
Hugo Garzón – vocals
Juan de Marcos González – bandleader, backing vocals, güiro
Rubén González – piano
Pío Leyva – vocals
Manuel 'Puntillita' Licea – vocals
Orlando 'Cachaíto' López – bass
Manuel 'Guajiro' Mirabal – trumpet
Eliades Ochoa – guitar, vocals
Omara Portuondo – vocals
Jesús 'Aguaje' Ramos – bandleader for Rubén González, trombone
Salvador Rupilado – bass
Compay Segundo – guitar, vocals
Benito Suárez Magana – guitar
Barbarito Torres – laoud
Alberto 'Virgilio' Valdés – maracas, backing vocals
Amadito Valdés – timbales



– Manuel 'Puntillita' Licea, Rubén González, Nick Gold, Eliades Ochoa, Roberto García,
Compay Segundo, Joachim Cooder, Manuel 'Guajiro' Mirabal, Omara Portuondo, Ry Cooder, Ibrahim Ferrer,
Barbarito Torres, Alberto 'Virgilio' Valdés, Orlando 'Cachaíto' López, Amadito Valdés, Pío Leyva,
Octavio Calderón, Benito Suárez Magana (Carnegie Hall) –





“It was never going to happen. Except that it did.”

Amadito Valdés “I still don’t know why Buena Vista Social Club became such a success except that we did it with no commercial intention. We did it with love and solidarity for Cuban music. The really important thing was that it put out there all these anonymous or long forgotten musicians and singers like Rubén and Ibrahim and they ended up as stars on stage at Carnegie Hall. For them it was a dream come true.”

Jesús “Aguaje” Ramos “After the record came out and people liked it, we heard they wanted to do a live show. It was difficult to organise because everybody was doing different things and Buena Vista Social Club wasn’t a touring band.”

Juan de Marcos González “I was touring with the Afro-Cuban All Stars and many of the musicians in that band played on the Buena Vista album. Some of the singers, including Ibrahim Ferrer, toured with us too, but we didn’t have the full line-up. People like Compay, Eliades and Omara had their own bands and Ry Cooder only ever played live with us three or four times. What was special was getting everybody together on the same stage and it happened first in Holland at the Carré Theatre.”

David Bither (Nonesuch Records) “Several of us from Nonesuch went over to Amsterdam to see the two shows there because we knew it was intended to be the only time it was going to happen. But after the first night, there was a very emotional feeling in the air and I remember going backstage to see Ry in his dressing room and saying we’ve got to do this in America. He agreed it had to be Carnegie Hall because we wanted to take it to the bastion of American high culture.”



~ Orlando ‘Cachaíto’ López, Joachim Cooder, Eliades Ochoa, Ry Cooder, Ibrahim Ferrer, Alberto ‘Virgilio’ Valdés, Pío Leyva, Manuel ‘Puntillita’ Licea, Angel ‘Terry’ Domech, Manuel ‘Guajiro’ Mirabal, Barbarito Torres, Juan de Marcos González (obscured), Amadito Valdés, Benito Suárez Magana ~





Wim Wenders (Film Director) "All the musicians were dreaming of it but nobody really believed they would all get American visas and Carnegie Hall would happen. When it seemed clear they were all going to make it, of course I had to be there with my cameras. New York and the most legendary concert hall in the world... it was a gift. To witness that time in their life and be with them was a privilege and a sheer pleasure."

Jenny Adlington (World Circuit Records) "The idea of playing Carnegie Hall first came up in April and the concert happened on July 1st, which is amazing. It ought to take months and months to set up something like that but we did it in a matter of weeks."

Angel 'Terry' Domech "I don't know who organised everything. Juan de Marcos just told us we were going to play in New York and gave us the tickets. For us it was easy!"

David Bither "Putting it together was full-on. I guess we had about eight weeks in real time to make it happen and somehow it did. There were issues with getting visas for the musicians, although fortunately it was a different political era and easier than it would be today. Because it was a one-off show and there wasn't going to be a tour we knew that it was going to cost a lot of money, but we decided it was one of those moments when you have to take a gamble."

Juan de Marcos González "We rehearsed for two days and the band was really tight because many of the musicians had played with me in the Afro-Cuban All Stars for the past year. But what people like Compay and Eliades did was unique and individual



and my job as bandleader was to get the right accompaniment for them. That was the easy part, though. The hardest thing was the stage directions. Jenny Adlington acted as stage manager and worked out how to get everybody in the right place at the right time."

Nick Gold (World Circuit Records) "A lot of the rehearsals were taken up with who goes on stage and when. We didn't want everyone on stage together the whole time. The idea was to present them in different groupings so it was customised and had plenty of variety."

Charlie Gillett (Writer and Broadcaster) "I went to the rehearsals and I was intrigued that so close to the show they were still working on the details of the arrangements. Ry was very busy organising things. But he did it in a very low-key way. There was no shouting or pushy management style. He'd just say whatever he wanted very quietly and if you hadn't known who he was, it was so subtle you probably wouldn't even have realised he was in charge."

Ry Cooder (Producer) "Rehearsing was interesting because it wasn't easy to get anybody's attention. There's a great precision in the music and the way Cubans play, but Compay would tune his instrument and it could be anywhere. You've got to be right with the piano but he'd pick up his guitar and be wildly out of tune. Usually he'd play sharp, like a lot of the old blues guys and rural musicians."

Juan de Marcos González "Compay was a law unto himself. I had to tell him he was out of tune and he was very angry with me. He didn't speak to me for hours. Then he





said, 'You're right. I must be getting old'. I knew him when I was a child, and he was like my uncle so he forgave me."

Jesús "Aguaje" Ramos "Compay would rehearse something and then in the show he'd decide to do something different. But Cuban musicians are very good at adapting. It might be difficult for others but for Cuban musicians it's easy because it's what we do. With Compay, we watched his hands. We knew what he was going to play from where he put his hands on his guitar."

David Bither "The rehearsals were at Studio Instrumental Rentals in Manhattan and a few blocks away there was a Cuban sidewalk café where everybody went afterwards. I remember one night a car screeched around the corner and Paquito D'Rivera got out along with some of the other exiled Cuban musicians who live in New York. They'd all known each other back in Havana but many of them hadn't seen each other in twenty or thirty years. There were a lot of those kinds of reunions going on and as the concert got nearer, you could sense the excitement building."

Nick Gold "There was an undeniable sense of it being an extraordinary occasion. They didn't customarily play together. They came together for ten days in Havana to make the record and then they reunited for these concerts. It was special for them all to be playing together. We were ramped up and very nervous but the main guys, like Rubén, Compay and Ibrahim didn't seem nervous at all. They were excited because it was a big deal, but they were comfortable with it."



~ Rubén González ~





Manuel 'Guajiro' Mirabal "Most of us had never been to New York before. We always wanted to go. Somebody asked Rubén if he'd been before and he said 'Yes, of course'. We asked him when and he said it was fifty years ago!"

Angel 'Terry' Domech "Two things made an impression on us in New York. Number one, it was the first time we were there. Secondly, it was the first time this music was being played in the Carnegie Hall by Cuban musicians coming from Cuba."

Omara Portuondo "Carnegie Hall was a very special place to me as when I was a child I had listened on the radio to concerts performed there. It was very moving for all of us. We thought it was wonderful to be in that marvellous theatre playing our traditional Cuban music and feeling as though the audience were recognising the value of what we were doing."

Juan de Marcos González "Being on stage anywhere with that band and those singers was a dream come true for me because the idea of working with these musicians had been in my head for ten years. All the old guys had been friends of my father and I had always wanted to make a record with them. But Carnegie Hall was something else. I was so happy to be there and to see people like Rubén and Ibrahim on that stage. It was never going to happen. Except that it did."

Eliades Ochoa "I've never felt so excited before a concert. It seemed like the audience were willing us on to bring some happiness into the hall. It wasn't just a concert. It was one of the most gigantic moments of my life."



~ Salvador Replado, Orlando 'Cachaíto' López,
Eliades Ochoa, Hugo Garzón, Ibrahim Ferrer ~







Jerry Boys (Recording Engineer) "Carnegie Hall had been designed for classical music, so it was a brilliant venue. But we had to be a bit flexible. I'd put five microphones across the stage, one for each of the different singers. But you couldn't direct Compay or Ibrahim. They'd just got to whichever microphone they fancied so we learned to go with that spontaneity."

Amadito Valdés "In Cuban music we like to act in the moment. We rehearse but there's always space for improvising and that always happens when we're on stage, even in a grand place like the Carnegie Hall!"

Jenny Adlington "I'd spent the rehearsal days drawing up stage instructions, but on the night it felt like chaos. It was impossible to follow the plans, but Juan de Marcos was flinging people on and off the stage and somehow it all seemed to work. I was in the wings, hoping and praying that everybody was in place. When I saw the film, I was amazed how beautifully choreographed it all appeared because it didn't feel like that at the time. I think it all flowed and just happened because of the strength of the music and the musicians."

Omara Portuondo "When I came onto the stage I was faced with this audience applauding and, shouting, excited for our Cuban group. I quickly went backstage again - it gave me stage fright to feel so many emotions. Juan de Marcos had to tell me to go back out again. I cried at various moments during that concert. Many of us cried on that magical night."



Ry Cooder "I was sitting on stage behind the singers praying it wouldn't break down. But it didn't, of course, because they were masters. The energy coming from the stage was fantastic. It was a big band and very complicated with who was doing what but it was an incredible performance and there was tremendous invention, especially by Rubén."

Jesús 'Aguaje' Ramos "When I think of Rubén, I can still hear him play. At the rehearsal, Rubén didn't remember anything. But he said 'Don't worry. I'll go back to the hotel and have a shower and when we do the show I'll remember everything.' And that's what happened. That night he remembered it all and he played magnificently. In the concert he was non-stop. The greatest applause I have ever heard in my whole lifetime was the applause for Rubén at the Carnegie Hall. I've never seen anything like that."

Juan de Marcos González "Rubén was actually very disciplined. Of course, he always wanted to keep playing. But he knew what he was doing. The great thing was that before Carnegie Hall it was like a game. I don't think coming out of retirement like he did felt quite real to him. He realised at Carnegie Hall that at eighty he had finally become a true star."

Orlando 'Cachaíto' López "You won't ever find another pianist like Rubén González..."

Jerry Boys "If there was anything in the show that didn't strictly go according to the script it didn't matter because the feeling in the hall was so exhilarating and exciting. I'm glad I was out front doing the sound rather than in a recording truck somewhere





out the back because I'd have to say it was the most atmospheric thing I've ever done in my career. People were waving Cuban flags and it was a celebration, enhanced by the feeling that as Cubans they weren't ever really supposed to be there in the most prestigious concert hall in America."

Eliades Ochoa "We all experienced great patriotism to be there. It felt that we were opening the door of Cuba to the world. I know Compay and Ibrahim strongly felt that too."

Nick Gold "I felt the show was quite triumphant. Swagger is the wrong word but they had a confidence because they knew from Amsterdam that they could pull it off. I think that upped the level of the musicianship and the whole concert was incredibly uplifting. There were a lot of moments that genuinely sent a tingle up your spine."

Ry Cooder "It was like all the genies were out of the bottle."

Amadito Valdés "I think the second loudest applause after Rubén was for Barbarito when he played the laoud behind his back..."

Barbarito Torres "I tried playing it behind my back with Juan de Marcos as a joke. Then during the soundcheck he said 'Let's put it in the show'. I said 'No, it's ridiculous'. But he said 'Yes, it's good, people will love it'. And he was right. The audiences in Amsterdam and in New York loved it and I've been doing it ever since!"



~ Rubén González ~





~ Ibrahim Ferrer & Omara Portuondo ~



Omara Portuondo "Ibrahim asked me to sing "Silencio" with him and for me that was the highlight. It made me feel so happy to see him singing and to see how he was moved. We had worked together many times in the past and to find ourselves together again was a big thing. It was impossible to keep back the tears and when Ibrahim got out his handkerchief... at that moment we looked at each other and I can't describe in words what we felt. That was a magical moment. Everyone knows it. It was pure poetry, something spontaneous and natural. Unforgettable!"

Wim Wenders "They were all thrilled to be there but Ibrahim Ferrer was totally elated. When he did "Candela" his words were improvised. I heard him singing that song so often and it was never the same. Each time he added new lines. After he'd sung it everybody was on their feet clapping and cheering and Ibrahim was just standing in the middle of the stage thinking of something altogether different, going back in time and remembering. That for me was the highlight of the entire experience. He looked at the people there in front of him and I think he said a little prayer for his mother. He was still standing there transfixed when the others picked up "Chan Chan" again."

Eliades Ochoa "I'd been playing "Chan Chan" with Compay for many years before but it seemed to become Buena Vista's signature tune. I was very proud to sing it with him because it is a special song but if you listen to how we played it in concert, I added some extra melodies on the guitar which gave it something else."

David Bither "Sitting in the hall that night was so emotional - I have never seen or heard a musical event like it. To me as an American it seemed that forty years of





history burst open in that room that night. It was like a window had been opened and the sunshine and light had been let in. Three years later, it was slammed shut again and that opportunity for Cuban musicians to play in America came to an end, so looking back it seems almost mythic.”

Juan de Marcos González “For Cuban musicians, it was something very special to play Carnegie Hall. We had not had the chance to perform in America for almost forty years because of the blockade. But I looked out from the stage and all I could see was smiles on the faces of an American audience.”

Angel ‘Terry’ Domech “For the first time it felt like Cuban music had the right to be in a place like the Carnegie Hall.”

Ry Cooder “They never lapsed into anything formulaic. It wasn’t Disneyland. They got inside the music and they did it on a level you don’t hear any more. It was real and honest and you could see how they were taking the audience with them. It was really something. The audience was composed of the same people who loved the studio record for its intimacy and simplicity. But this was something different - it was Buena Vista unchained. Even though they knew the record, there was a real surprise that night. It was special and everybody knew it.”

Nick Gold “I remember the Cuban flag appearing on stage at the end, and the emotion of the hall, and this sense sweeping over me that we’d really achieved something. I don’t remember anything else after that at all.”



Jesús ‘Aguaje’ Ramos “The moment when out of the blue the Cuban flag came on stage and everybody applauded was special. The whole American audience clapped the Cuban flag. That was unexpected.”

Juan de Marcos González “It was my aunt who lives in the Bronx who brought the flag on stage. She left Cuba in 1961 and had never been back since. She had never seen musicians from Cuba on stage in New York in all those years so for her, like everybody else, it was a very emotional moment.”

Eliades Ochoa “When they brought the flag into the theatre was the emotional highlight. For me there is no connection between music and politics. Music has no borders - and Carnegie Hall proved the point. All I felt at that concert was respect and affection and love between the audience and the musicians. So many people hugged us and took our hands and cheered our music and there were people outside who wanted to get in but couldn’t get a ticket. It was very moving to see that.”

Omara Portuondo “The moment when the Cuban flag was brought out and seeing the audience so devoted was a highlight for us all. But really it was of no importance whether the audience was American or English. The important thing was that they loved our music. I felt triumphant seeing how we all worked together as a group, seeing how the music reached the audience. In the film you can hear the applauding but live it was even more incredible! We felt so elated to be able to share our music. All of us had known each other for many years and played together many times, but it was a unique and unrepeatable occasion that our culture and our roots could reach the public through such a beautiful concert with all of us there together on the stage.”





Orlando 'Cachaito' López "All I can say is that it was a great concert and it was an honour to be there."

Jenny Adlington "It was incredibly hard work but the musicians made it easy. Working with them was exhilarating. There was a joy about them and they were totally relaxed and fun to be with, whatever happened."

Jerry Boys "After the show, most of us got into stretch limos and we were riding around New York drinking champagne. We were driven to a Cuban restaurant in Union City, just the other side of the Hudson River in New Jersey, which is a big Hispanic area. Of course, they all got up and jammed in the restaurant. They just wanted to carry on playing into the night."

Jesús "Aguaje" Ramos "It was pure pleasure riding around New York in the limousines. Everybody was laughing because the Cubans had become like the big American rock stars!"

Juan de Marcos González "We just carried on where the concert left off. Nobody wanted to stop. After Carnegie Hall, it seemed that after forty years of animosity, the doors of America had finally been opened to Cuban music."

Wim Wenders "I'd never shot a complete concert before and it felt like a privilege to be there to capture the occasion. When we finally arrived in New York, it felt like we had told a story in the film and the concert was the final chapter that finished the narrative."



~ Eliades Ochoa, Ibrahim Ferrer, Hugo Garzón, Ry Cooder (obscured), Alberto 'Virgilio' Valdés,
Juan de Marcos González, Angel 'Terry' Domech ~





~ Ibrahim Ferrer ~



Nick Gold "There was something beautiful about it - a purity. The whole project had been put together for the right reasons and a beautiful record came out of it. Then the concerts were a continuation of that. It's often been said that it was a dream come true but it really was. For everybody."

Eliades Ochoa "I'd like to thank everybody who made it happen because that concert was the number one in my career. I was born in the countryside and so it was an amazing journey for me and for the music. I'd rate it ten out of ten. Everybody played their best and everybody was at the top of their form because of the excitement. I'd even say it was probably the number one moment in the history of Cuban music because it opened up a window to the world."

Wim Wenders "Carnegie Hall was a madhouse that night. There was something sad and glorious about the evening at the same time. It was miraculous that they came together, but they would never all play together again."

Ry Cooder "Listening to the tapes of the concert for the first time in ten years, I'm struck by what an amazing musical event it was. You'll never hear it again, people of this calibre working together. They were dramatic personalities and they're now nearly all gone. There's nobody left like that any more."





– Compay Segundo –



A WORLD CIRCUIT PRODUCTION

Produced by *Ry Cooder*

Executive Producer *Nick Gold*

Recorded by *Jerry Boys with John Harris, Randy Ezratty and John Bates of Effanel Music*

Recorded on *1st July 1998 at Carnegie Hall, New York*

Mixed by *Martin Pradler*

Mixed at *Bay 7 Studios, Valley Village, California*

Assistant Mix Engineer *Joshua Smith*

Mastered by *Bernie Grundman, Los Angeles*

Cover by *Jon Smith and iwant Design*

Artwork by *iwant Design*

Photography by *Jon Smith, Ebet Roberts, Donata Wenders, Geraint Lewis, Susan Titelman*

Sleevenotes by *Nigel Williamson*

Compay Segundo appears courtesy of Warner Music Spain

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all those who made this concert and release possible

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