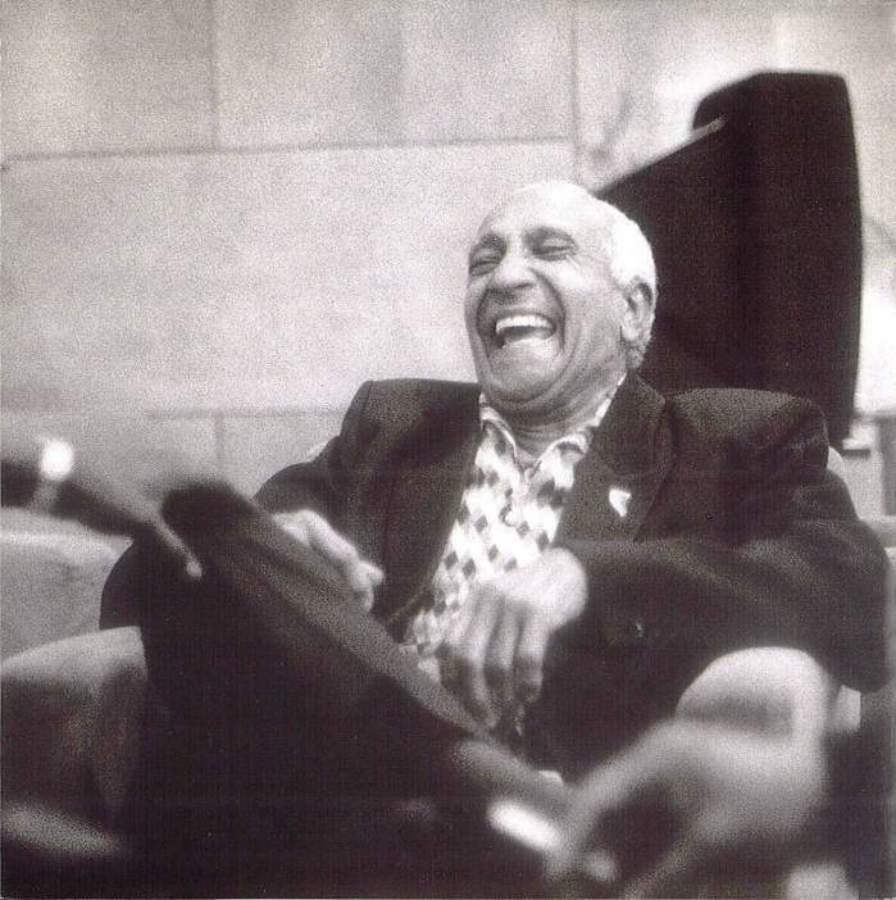






"I have never liked
sitting at home
doing nothing..."



Rubén González piano

Orlando 'Cachaíto' López bass

Amadito Valdés timbales

Miguel 'Angá' Díaz congas (2,3,6)

Angel Terry congas

Roberto García bongos, cowbell, güiro

Alberto 'Virgilio' Valdés maracas

Alejandro Pichardo Perez güiro, clave

Manuel 'Guajiro' Mirabal trumpet

Jesús 'Aguaje' Ramos trombone

Ibrahim Ferrer vocal (2, 6) & chorus

Cheikh Lô vocal (6)

Jesús 'Aguaje' Ramos & Lázaro Villa
vocal (4) & chorus

Richard Egües flute (4,5)

Joaquín Oliveiras flute (4)

Javier Zalba baritone sax (1)

Lázaro Ordóñez Enriquez violin (4)

Eliades Ochoa guitar (6)

Papi Oviedo tres (6)

Ry Cooder tres (10)

Joachim Cooder drums (10)

Musical director Jesús 'Aguaje' Ramos

the musicians

Amadito Valdés plays Meinl Percussion and Regal
Tip Signature model exclusively

Eliades Ochoa appears courtesy of Virgin, Spain

Papi Oviedo appears courtesy of Tumi Records



Sixty years ago Rubén González could as easily have become a doctor as a piano player – until the Havana nightclubs beckoned. But if music is a healing force then maybe it wasn't such a dramatic a career move.

'**Chanchullo**' is the follow-up to Rubén's debut album '**Introducing...**', which was recorded when the pianist was already 77 years old – and undoubtedly confirms that a regular infusion of hot music is good for the body and the soul. The story of how 'Introducing...' came to be made is now the stuff of legend. In 1996 one of the acknowledged giants of Cuban piano had been retired for a decade when he was invited back into the studio to play on the first

'Afro Cuban All Stars' and the original 'Buena Vista Social Club' albums. These were mere warm-up sessions and as the days passed his playing became stronger and stronger culminating in the unplanned recording of his own astonishing album in the remaining two days of studio time.

González returned to playing in 1996 with a vigour and relish that made listeners re-examine his date of birth with gathering disbelief. But Rubén believed it – he knew this moment would come and had been waiting for it. He was told many years ago that he would see success in his mature years. It was as if a long-dammed source of music had been released, this young spirit in an old frame took to the keyboard again as if he had no means of stopping the sounds flowing from his fingers. With 'Chanchullo', the flow has accelerated. It is a set with a unique feel – a little less stately and meticulous, more powerful, energised, vital and confident.

Since the release of that remarkable trilogy of albums, González has been touring the world giving concerts and it is his desire to travel and play every day of his life. The superb band on 'Chanchullo' is his regular

touring group, drawn from the dream collective of the now internationally celebrated Havana house band of World Circuit's 'Buena Vista Social Club'. They have won the hearts of listeners everywhere with the sheer quality of their playing, and the infectiousness of their obvious love of music-making glows from the stage. Bassist Cachafío López (son of Orestes López and nephew of Israel 'Cachao' López) has both the powerful sound and propulsive rhythmic drive of the best bass players in any idiom, combine this with his seemingly telepathic communication with Rubén and the groove cannot fail. Add the subtle, effortlessly swinging timbales of Amadito Valdés, the explosive congas of Miguel 'Angá' Díaz and Angel Terry, and the extraordinary Roberto García on bongos and you have simply one of the best rhythm sections in the world. Trumpeter Guajiro Mirabal has all the heat and attack of the Cuban brass legends, and a delicate clarity which sparks much of the music's exuberance. The sonorous trombone of Jesús 'Aguaje' Ramos adds depth, and his brilliance of timing and communication are crucial to his role as musical director. All in all an ensemble of remarkable

individuals who combine to become something more remarkable still.

In its live atmosphere (studio-recorded but reflecting the sound and approach of a club session), this album catches the leader's captivating ability to lose himself in playing so completely that all sense of time disappears — and the way he subtly transforms what seems at first to be a leisurely drift through the essentials of Cuban dance-tunes into something altogether stranger, more vivid and personal.

Songs are Rubén González's autobiography, more so here than ever — yet his life is fascinating, even described in more conventional terms. He was a piano prodigy as a child (graduating on piano from the Cienfuegos Conservatoire at 15), but studied for a career in medicine at first, only abandoning it in favour of a life in music when he moved from his hometown of Santa Clara to Havana in 1941. That move immediately put González in the right place at the right time. Havana was boiling with exhilarating sounds — a revolution was taking place in Cuban music and two groups were at the forefront; Arcaño's violin and flute danzón orchestra and

Arsenio Rodríguez's two-trumpet son conjunto. Rubén loved them both. 'It was at this point that the special possibilities of Cuban music were achieved and revealed'. This was the music of his dreams and the music which has remained the staple base of his repertoire ever since.

Leading the revolution in Arcaño's group were the brothers Israel and Orestes López whose introduction of syncopated elements of the son created the *ritmo nuevo danzón*, which so shocked Havana society that it was banned from a number of the group's regular venues. Israel López later distilled the brothers' creation to its purest form with the *descarga* (Afro-Cuban jam) where musicians improvise over a simple tumbao (bass riff).

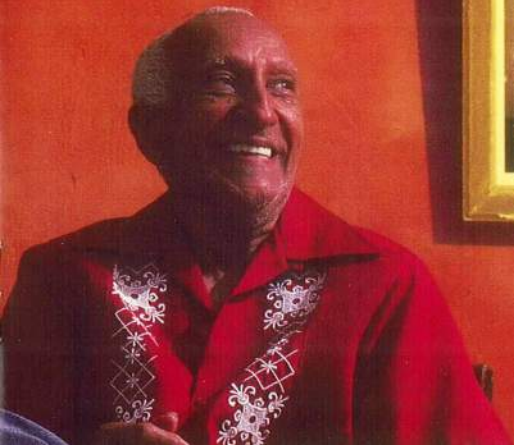
'**Chanchullo**', which opens the album, is a classic. Rubén is a master of the style and he unleashes an extraordinary solo, sparkling with energy and imagination as he moves restlessly from idea to idea, mixing quotes from various Cuban songs with his trademark adaptations of classical exercises.

While Arcaño's group were shocking danzón society, Arsenio Rodríguez's explosive new conjunto with its driving conga

drums and blasting two-trumpet front line pushed the boundaries still further. Within weeks of his arrival in Havana, Rubén was hired as the band's pianist and to this day he talks of Arsenio as his single most important musical influence. 'I got my style from Arsenio who was not a piano player. He taught me many things; to always think about a solo before playing it, never to play the same thing twice and never depart from the rhythm.' '**De una manera espantosa**' ('In an Outrageous Way') was one of first songs Rubén played with the Rodríguez group. The impromptu studio arrangement for trombone and trumpet has an easy lilt before giving way to a typical Arsenio style son montuno with solos by Guajiro Mirabal and Rubén peppered with the '*joie de vivre*' of Ibrahim Ferrer.







'**La lluvia**' (The Rain) was spontaneously created by the musicians following recording 'Espantosa'. The studio roof was leaking and a downpour of tropical rain (audible at the start of the song) meant that there were only minutes remaining before the studio had to be abandoned. The band was in the mood to play and after a quick rehearsal this *descarga* was recorded. A wonderful group performance, it features the conga maestro Miguel 'Angá' Díaz in dialogue with Rubén as well as the explosive timbales of Amadito Valdés.

By contrast, '**Central Constanca**' is a gentle formal *danzón* spun around the lilting violin of the late Lázaro Ordóñez Enriquez. This performance is dedicated to Ordóñez, whose last recording this was. Enrique Jorrin, one of Rubén's closest associates over the years, wrote this delicate little vignette. Since Jorrin was also the inventor of the cha cha cha, it's appropriate that the piece turns into one for the improvisations, with the bird-like flutter and quiver of the great Richard Egües an almost ethereal presence.

But there's quite a different Rubén González for one of the

most widely-travelled and best-loved dance tunes of the 1950s, '**Quizás, quizás**' ('Perhaps, Perhaps'). Familiar with the song as an accompanist to vocalists, he lays aside his rich tapestry of melodic magic for something altogether more restrained, feeling his way toward the centre of this haunting theme with yearning eloquence. Santiago guitarist Eliades Ochoa, who González met during the Buena Vista sessions, picks up the mood and imparts his own interpretation, before the theme returns to be embraced by a deliciously soft flute line.

'**Choco's Guajira**', a son taken at a daringly slow tempo, celebrates the work of a widely loved and respected Cuban sideman, the trumpeter 'Chocolate' Armenteros, celebrated for his work with Arsenio Rodríguez and Machito. It's one of the most atmospheric episodes on the disc, with its contrasts between the insistent chants of the singers and the glittering sound of Mirabal's trumpet, and Ibrahim Ferrer's at times almost eerie mirroring of the trumpet line, with his plaintiveness and emotive vibrato. Adding to the atmosphere are Papi Oviedo on tres and the improvised vocals of Senegalese singer Cheikh Lô.

If 'Choco's Guajira' is one of the standout group performances of this session, the brief, telling bolero '**Si te contaré**' is a little masterpiece for González, composed by another Arcaño alumni Felix Reina. A romantic melody embroidered by arpeggios and unexpectedly emphatic chords, it is an object lesson in the way an imaginative soloist reveals the hidden implications of a tune.

Rubén is a master of the cha cha cha due to his years with it's creator Jorrin and Orchestra America and there are two classics of the genre on this album. The first, '**El bodeguero**' was composed by flautist Richard Egües – soloist and arranger of Orchestra Aragón, the great rivals of Orchestra America. The tune starts with the typical casual sway, (but as always pushed by the rhythmic groove of Rubén and Cachafito), then the trumpet ups the ante forming a bridge to a surprisingly simple and jaunty González solo, tied more closely to the chords. He soon gets into his regular stride after the vocals return, his percussive chords sounding like somebody knocking on a door. Ramos' trombone has a more bluff and rugged sound now, but without

sacrificing any of this fine player's affecting warmth and mellowness as the rhythm section get in the groove and elevate the whole to a sedate swing.

'**Isora Club**', is another social club danzón, composed by another of the López dynasty, this time by Israel and Orestes' sister Coralia. It features an unusual instrumentation, with the trombone taking the main melody lines (normally reserved for flute or strings) and its warmth and intensity gathers as the song develops, considerably stirred once again by Mirabal's flamethrowing trumpet. Fittingly, considering the family connection, Cachaito takes a bass solo straying tantalisingly in and out of range of Rubén's hypnotically ticking piano.

The second cha cha cha is the easy swinging '**Rico Vacilón**' featuring Ry Cooder on tres, Joachim Cooder on drums and a delectably relaxed González solo at the end.

Fittingly they all go out with a bang – a short, punchy descarga called '**Pa' gozar**', composed by Tata Güines and reflecting the jamming feel that much of the music on this disc gives out.

The origins of this piece might be a symbolic gesture to Rubén González's pride of place. The theme was first recorded over thirty years ago by pianist Pedro 'Peruchin' Jutziz. Jutziz and Lili Martínez were regarded then as two of a supreme triumvirate of Cuban pianists from a golden age of the island's music – the third, of course, being the only survivor, Rubén González himself. As 'Pa' gozar' gets hotter and hotter, it stretches credibility to consider just how dazzlingly Rubén González's reflection of that golden age has survived along with him. He understands the essence in Cuban music he has called 'that special atmosphere, the high

exposure of the rhythm... times when the music seems about to take one path and then takes another. That is the key'.

The key is in your hands now. Long may Rubén González be waiting for you behind the door.

John Fordham



aworldcircuitproduction



Produced by Nick Gold

Recorded and mixed by Jerry Boys

Musical director Jesús 'Aguaje' Ramos

Recorded at EGREM Studios, Havana
and Angel Studios, London, 1997–2000

Mixed and mastered at Livingston Studios, London

Mastered by Jerry Boys and Tom Leader

Assistant recording engineers Simon Burwell

and Julio Martínez Rodríguez

Assistant mix engineer Simon Burwell

Havana administration Zita M. Morrina

Piano Tuner Casanova

Cover photograph Cristina Piza

Other photography Christina Jaspars

and Susan Titelman

Centre page photograph David Burton

Archive photography courtesy of Rubén González

Design Kathryn Samson

Print production Intro

Research Sigfredo Ariel

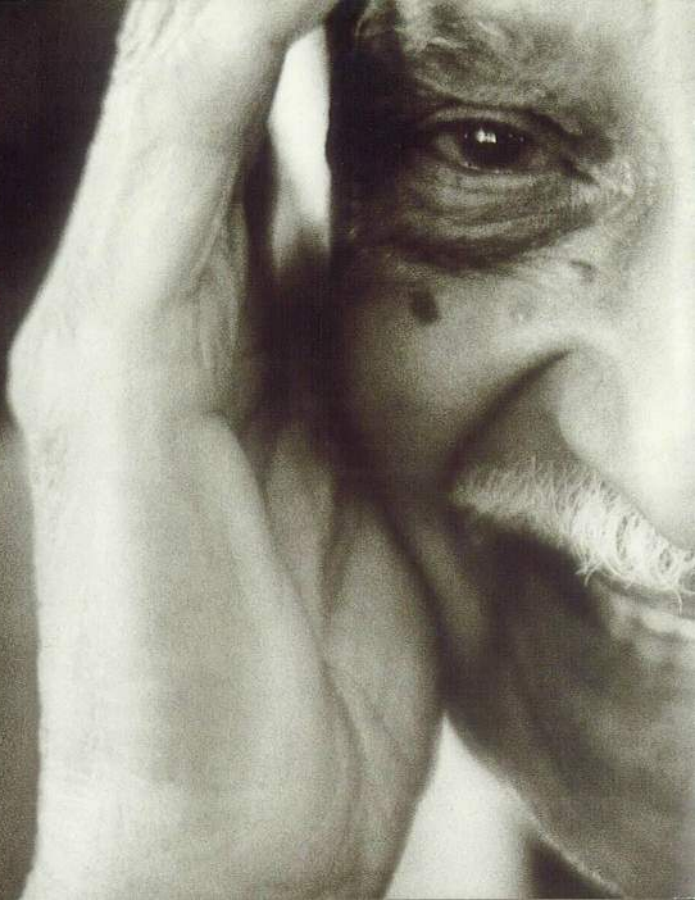
With thanks to
Jenny Addlington, Glicería Abreu,
Ry Cooder, Dani Florestano,
David Flower, Juan de Marcos González

A black and white photograph of a man in a suit, smiling and reaching out towards a crowd of people. The image is dark and grainy, with the man's face and hand being the primary light sources. The text is overlaid in a red, serif font.

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