

## Cuba and Brazil: at a junction

The Cuban pianist Gonzalo Rubalcaba first met the Brazilian singer, composer, and guitar player João Bosco at the junction of two roads facing Pequeá beach, in Ilhabela (on the shore of São Paulo state) during the I Ilhabela Summer Festival, in January 2000. Ivan Lins, another Brazilian singer and composer, was also with them at this occasion.

Gonzalo Rubalcaba and João Bosco then formed a duo set and delighted the Festival audience with their two auditions during the Festival. These performances, which moved the audience deeply, sealed the perfect union between Brazilian popular music and Cuban jazz.

The feeling of "love at first audition" shared by Bosco, Rubalcaba and the audience matured, turned into a finely tuned partnership, and then trailed the Brazilian roads. As of June 2000 they have charmed other audiences in major Brazilian cities like Brasília, Porto Alegre, São Paulo and Florianópolis.

Bosco, born in the state of Minas Gerais but "carioca" (one who was born in Rio) at heart, explains what went on the stage when the two Latin blood streams converged into a common blood vessel: " This junction between Brazilian and Cuban music is always a spell of magic. It enriches the music of both countries. Our partnership has evolved into vigorous, warm and sensitive collaborative work. "

Their work goes beyond the mere encounter of two exuberant musical currents. In fact, Bosco and Rubalcaba have found the common musical spring that feeds into the music of both countries - Brazil and Cuba - and have had a great time in these water ponds.

"The African roots constitute an extremely strong common ground for our work. However, it is not the percussion of black music that accounts for the similarities between Brazil and Cuba, but mainly the harmony of both musics. Being with Gonzalo - and that means not only to explore his technique, but mainly his sensitivity and imagination - when he starts to elaborate on themes that are common to both of us, that's when it gets thrilling, real beautiful to see and hear", admits João Bosco.

For about two hours, the audience is the fortunate witness of this exciting ecumenical musical encounter. Rubalcaba's impeccable improvisation technique and Bosco's rapt music and passionate band win us since the first number: the classical "chorinho" "Tico-Tico no Fubá", which is performed in a jazz version that is quite distant from the original tempo that is typical of Brazilian music.

Following this initial number, João Bosco's quintet unites with the Cuban trio to perform two songs by Bosco: "Ronco da Cuíca" - which has been turned into a zestful Latin jazz, a powerful melodious mass - and "Coisa Feita".

Then, Gonzalo Rubalcaba depicts all his genius at the piano and his

admirable ability to explore the harmonic possibilities of a melody accompanied by two master musicians: Carlos Henriquez, at the bass and Ignacio Berroa, at the drums. The trio performs some of the songs of Rubalcaba's latest CD "Inner Voyage": "Yolanda Anas" - a striking jazz theme that ends up in a bolero pace; the melody-broken mambo "The Hard One"; "Joan"; the tender theme "Here's that Rainy Day"; and finally a "sonera" version of the "standard" "Caravan", by Duke Ellington.

After that João Bosco returns to the stage with his band, and the 'octet' dwell into "Aguas de Março", by Tom Jobim. The Brazilian solo set starts with the song "Enquanto Espero", and then alternate boleros and other hits composed by Bosco, such as "Papel Maché", "Corsário" and "Holofotes". Bosco's acknowledged competence is cherished by his band's members - the guitar player Nelson Faria, the bass player João Baptista, Marçal at the percussion, and Kiko Freitas at the drums.

The last part of the audition reunites Rubalcaba, Bosco and their bands, and enraptures the audience by showing the family bonds between Brazil and Cuba. The shared rhythmic, melodic, and thematic features become evident when "Incompatibilidade de Gênios" and "Linha de Passe" are performed by the pianist at inspired solos.

What happens on that stage is simply grand. The compatibility between the genius of João Bosco and Gonzalo Rubalcaba produces the best that the music from the Americas can offer the world. This is not fast-consuming music, nor the 'caliente' Latin fad that entertains the Northern Hemisphere 'gringos' during the summer. The music produced by these genies flies sky high.

"I just follow the needs I have in here", explains Rubalcaba, pointing at his own mind.

Roger Lerina, journalist