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INTERVIEWS



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**Interview/Performance Review**  
**Angel David Mattos and the Jazz Boricua Quartet**  
**Live at the Triad, July 23, 2005**  
**by Tomas Peña**

On Saturday, July 23rd. pianist Angel David Mattos and the Jazz Boricua Quartet performed at The Triad, an intimate performance space on New York's upper west side. The quartet performed selections from Danzzaj, an innovative fusion of traditional Puerto Rican Danza and North American jazz.

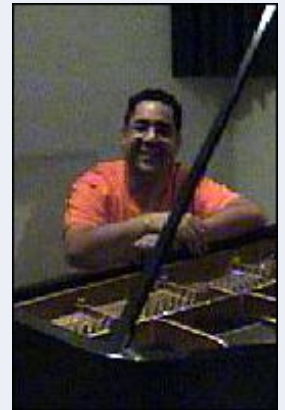
Although the history of jazz has been well documented, Danza has been relegated to a symbol of Puerto Rico's elegant past. Actually, Danza began as folkloric music based on Spanish (contradanza) and African influences. As Danza evolved, it also became a popular ballroom dance. Later, composers such as Manuel Tavarez and Juan Morel Campos took the Danza to another level by creating compositions that encompassed dancing as well as artistic expression.

For some time now, Angel David Mattos has been conducting research on the subject and he found that the similarities between Danza and Jazz far outweigh the differences. According to Angel David Mattos, "It is time for this sophisticated and elegant music to merge in the inclusive grounds of jazz. Both styles compliment each other just as in a perfect marriage; each brings the best of themselves . . . "

The quartet performed selections such as Felices Dias, Danza al Maestro, Maldito Amor, Point of Reference and a beautiful ballad by Manuel Tavarez. Angel David Mattos enthusiastically led the way, while saxophonist Jorge Castro, drummer Hector Matos and Elias Cervas (who ably filled in for John Benitez) straddled the line between tradition and innovation. After the show, I had the pleasure of speaking with Angel David.

**TP: Thank you for an evening of interesting and enlightening music. Who are some your musical influences?**

ADM: Thank You! On the jazz side, pianists Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea and Bud Powell. Of course, Bud Powell was one of Chick Corea's influences.



**TP: What sparked your interest in fusing traditional Puerto Rican Danza with North American jazz?**

ADM: Much like Jazz, Danza is a musical style that combines melody, harmony and rhythms. In addition, Danza is influenced by European music and African rhythms. So, in a sense, Jazz and Caribbean music are like cousins. On the surface, jazz works one way and Danza works another, but, if you take a New Orleans rhythm and subtract the swing, you have the Danza (demonstrates by humming the two).

**TP: Have you had a chance to listen to (saxophonist) Miguel Zenon's latest recording, Jibaro (Note: Marsalis Music, 2005)?**

ADM: Yes . . .

**TP: Jibaro is a tour-de-force for Zenon, but what I am getting is the difference in your styles. Zenon tends to write music that is difficult to play. On the other hand, your music, though no less difficult, is more approachable. When I say approachable, I am referring to the fact that one can clearly hear Danza, Jazz and where the two converge . . .**

ADM: I have spent years researching, writing, arranging and seeing where Danza and Jazz converge. During the course of my research I came to realize what I could and could not do if I wanted Jazz and Danza to be present, so that you can feel (and hear) both . . .

**TP: To the best of your knowledge, have there been any past attempts to merge Danza and jazz?**

ADM: No. I have heard jazz standards played in a Danza rhythm, or a Danza melody played in swing . . . however, I am not aware of anything as profound as this project.

**TP: What prompted your decision to present your material via a traditional jazz quartet format? Why not, say, a trio format?**

ADM: With a trio there is more space to work. In the beginning, years ago, I was frightened to play in a trio . . .

**TP: Why is that?**

ADM: Well, with a trio there is a lot of space to fill. With a quartet, you have another instrument playing so one can concentrate on the harmonies.

**TP: Would you consider presenting your concept on a larger scale, say, with strings?**

ADM: Yes, actually I have already put together a small ensemble, called the Jazz Boricua Ensemble. We are currently working on arrangements that include the various folkloric rhythms of Puerto Rico.

**TP: Danzajj has received outstanding reviews. One critic went so far as to call it, "the best and most creative jazz album ever recorded by a Puerto Rican pianist" and a " . . . profound reflection on the interaction between a classic Caribbean musical form with that of North American jazz music." How does it feel to have your concept (and music) so well received?**

ADM: Thank You. I think a lot of people like this type of jazz because I do not go too deep or too shallow into jazz. I like the option of going either way. My point is, that is where you consider the public, you want them to follow you. You don't want them to get lost in the music.

**TP: In keeping with that, you provided the audience with a wealth of information about the history of Danza and the inner-workings of your concept (Co-Editor's note: a reference to various handouts that was distributed prior to the show).**

ADM: Yes, I wanted to do this because I am a teacher (at the University of Puerto Rico). I strive to make every situation an educational one.

**TP: In your opinion, is Puerto Rican music finally receiving the attention it deserves?**

ADM: This century is sort of looking that way. Miguel Zenon, William Cepeda and I are working. In 1994 I was in New York, with Pedro Guzman and we recorded Jibaro Jazz at the Blue Note (Note: Rodven Records, 1994).

**TP: Ah, yes, Jibaro Jazz, I remember it well.**

ADM: That was where I began working on folkloric music. I composed two songs for Jibaro Jazz.

**TP: I would be remiss if I did not offer my congratulations to you on receiving the Century Music Award for the Best Latin Jazz Production of 2004!**

ADM: Thank You.

**TP: Before I rap things up, where can Danzzaj be purchased? Is it available in stores?**

ADM: Yes, It is available at Tower Records. It is also available on the web at: [www.cdbaby.com](http://www.cdbaby.com) and [www.angeldavidmattos.com](http://www.angeldavidmattos.com)

**TP: Thank you for taking the time to speak with me. I wish you continued success with Danzzaj and your upcoming projects.**

**For additional information on Angel David Mattos visit: [www.angeldavidmattos.com](http://www.angeldavidmattos.com)**

Tomas Peña - Co-Editor  
Latin Jazz Network  
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ANGEL DAVID MATTOS - DANZZAJ  
2004 Angel David Mattos

Angel David Mattos: piano

Featuring

Bob Mintzer: saxophone  
John Benitez: bass  
Antonio Sanchez: drums  
Hector Matos: drums

**Tracks:** (click on titles to listen)

1. **No Me Toques**
2. **Danza Al Maestro**
3. **Tropical Zone**
4. **Felices Dias**
5. **Copy Cat**
6. **Margarita**
7. **El Bravo E.S**
8. **Las Antillas**
9. **Maldito Amor**
10. **Point Of Reference**



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