

- [New Releases](#)
- [Press Releases](#)
- [Yahoo! Groups](#)
- [Calle 54](#)
- [Anapapaya](#)
- [Jazz Buffalo](#)
- [Suggest Link](#)
- [Submit Article](#)
- [Submit Review](#)

.....INTERVIEWS

[home](#) > [interviews](#) > eliseo borrero

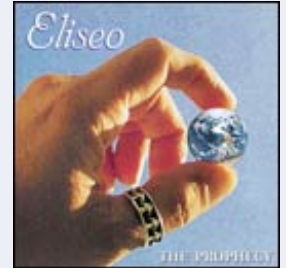
**Conversation with Eliseo Borrero**

by Thomas Peña



"I think Latin Jazz is growing in popularity around the world and people in general are training their ears. This is going to be the music of the century."

Posted on September 1, 2002



Eliseo Borrero  
THE PROPHECY  
Elabor Records 2001  
Produced by  
Eliseo Borrero

**Your new recording, "The Prophecy", has been described as: "a fascinating Latin Jazz and salsa recording" - "a nice surprise" - "high energy" - "a bit of everything under the Afro-Cuban umbrella" and "a successful alternative to the repetitive Latin Jazz market." How would YOU describe "The Prophecy"?**

When I started writing material for my second independent release "The Prophecy", I tried to keep the so called Latin/Jazz (afro-caribbean) tradition but also bring influence from "World Music". I wanted to keep unity and at the same time be eclectic. It is a mix of all your dreams and experiences. The ancient rhythms and harmonies of Africa, the Mediterranean region and whatever was left from the Taíno Indian culture mixed with my own "vision of the future".

**Why did you decide to go the independent route? What are the advantages and disadvantages of a self-financed project?**

I've been working with other bands and they went independent because of problems with record companies. Unfortunately, we don't live in a perfect world, and sometimes some people "forget to pay the musician". The union (AFM local 47) had Barbara Markay develop a manual on how to get your music out there. That has been the difference. It was very helpful. I still think: If the music is good, it has an opportunity with the listeners. It's the old David and Goliath story. There's a proverb "amateurs built the Arc, professionals built the Titanic". But of course, if the "good record deal" appears, I would be more than happy to merge with a bigger company.



1. **COMPARSA PA'L COMPADRE**
2. **THE PROPHECY**
3. **VARIACION DE IMPROMPTU**
4. **SAO PAULO**
5. **ELEGUA'S HIP-HOP**
6. **STELLA BY STARLIGHT**
7. **PESADILLA**
8. **BOMBEANDO**
9. **SI ASI FUERA**



**THE PROPHECY makes some powerful artistic, musical and political statements.**

**Let's begin with the futuristic cover-art. What is the symbolism behind the photograph on the cover (a hand holding a miniature globe/earth)?**

The cover of the CD is a picture of the most important thing that we have, our planet. It reflects a small fragile world that we hold in our hands. It also reflects my influence in music which has always been "multilingual" or "eclectic". We (the human race) have to be conscious of our planet needs. We should try to conserve it, because it's great! I don't consider these statements to be political, they are human rights statements.

**You dedicated this recording to the people of Vieques. What is the current status of the situation in Vieques and why are you so passionate about it?**

It's about freedom in music and to the people. The Vieques situation seems to be overshadowed by 9-11 events, because now the military fanatics have a reason for training their troops there, but the problem is still there. Simply put, there is a group of people (almost everybody) that do not want to share the island with the Navy but their opinion doesn't count. That's a dictatorship, not democracy. Fortunately after all the effort of many activists there has been a compromise by the U.S. to solve the situation, so there is hope. I met a musician from Vieques when I was studying at the Conservatory in Puerto Rico and we became good friends, he told me a lot about the island. I've never been in Vieques but I've done kajaking on the southern coast of P.R. and it's a wonderful experience that everybody should have. You feel like flying. The water is so clear you can see the bottom way before you get to the shore, not to mention the wild life. I just want everybody to know about this.

**You composed 8 of the 9 tracks on this recording. The compositions are a diverse array of - Latin Jazz, Salsa, Brazilian, Rap, Hip-Hop, Electronic music and traditional Puerto Rican rhythms. Would you elaborate on some of the material?**

I basically wrote 7 of the nine tunes on the CD. What I call "Variación de Impromptu" is a new version of a P.R. Danza (a popular form and style of the 20's and 30's specially in Ponce P.R.) "Impromptu" by Luis R. Miranda. I tried to match different colors, feelings, that move you or take you somewhere. I try to incorporate everything I like, at the moment of composition, every tune need its personality. I visualize it as making clothes; you have lots of fabrics with different patterns and colors but some don't match, your job is to make it so that you and others like it, but you can't please everybody.

I had the opportunity to visit Brasil and I loved it, so I play a little samba mixed with mambo. Also I think the voice is also an important instrument, I like to always have something vocal (either a regular lead voice and background vocals or vocal effects) it really makes a difference. I also experimented with having two different parallel rhythms at the same time like "Elegua's Hip-Hop" where the timbales are playing 6/8 afro style and the cajón, bass and piano are playing "half time" Hip-Hop. I think, for me, the best would be to explore and discover my own roots (afro caribbean) and build on top of that. Saying "I play Jazz" it's not enough, Jazz is like a tree that develops new branches every day yet you don't see it happening. It has become a small jungle with all the labels there are: Smooth Jazz, Latin Jazz, Straight Ahead, Rock Jazz, Free Jazz, etc. There will be more in the future. I think an appropriate genre for my music would be Afro-latin-jazz-tropical. But for short let's just call it Latin Jazz.

**You assembled some of the finest musicians on the West Coast for this recording. Please introduce the band members to our readers.**

For special music you need special musicians. There are many great cats on the West Coast but, I chose to have Joe Rotondi and Otmaro Ruiz on piano & keyboards. One of the best conga players in L.A. Joey Deleón on various percussion. Another of the most talented drummers in L.A. now playing

with Marc Anthony, Ricardo "Tiki" Pasillas on timbales and percussion. I was Lucky to find Alex Acuña just one day before a tour, I called him and I told him about the project and he said "I got to help you, I can do it tomorrow if you want" and we managed to do 2 tunes. Ramón Flores did some high energy solos on the trumpet supported by John Fumo, Julius Meléndez, another puertorican band leader and side man with Santana, also did some great trumpet solos, David Stout helped me to clean-up the arrangements and played trombone along with with some exciting solos by Eric Georgensen on trombone too. Ramón Yslas on cajón and Robertito Meléndez on batás, brought a new force to the percusive/modal Elegua's Hip-Hop, Willie Cadenas and Alberto Mirabal complemented the "coros santeros" and "salseros". A phenomenal Cuban drummer, Jimmy Branly spices up "The Prophecy" and "São Paulo". The delicate bowing of Jenny Chun and Charley Bisharat ornament the famous standard "Stella by Starlight" and last but not least, Ramón "Mongo" Ramos makes the bongo talk on "Bombeando" (written by Eliseo but first released by Papo Lucca on "Papo Lucca Latin Jazz" Fania Records). We have been playing live in the L.A area with Fausto Cuevas on timbales.

**You play the guitar/cuatro and sing. However, the bass is your primary instrument of choice. Why?**

I've had the urge to play more than one instrument since I was 13. I tried trombone, percussion, and basically everything. But I realized that it was going to be hard enough to master just one intrument, so I started with guitar (about 1970) because that was what my family could afford, soon I started doing gigs in town with a bass that a friend of mine sold me, with the amp, and gave me the gig so I could pay him the \$300 in six \$50 installments. Also, I had a cousin, Pito Martel, who played upright-bass proffessionaly and taught me a lot. So I decided to study bass. The guitar is my composition intrument because I don't play piano and it's hard to play chords on the bass. About 4 years ago, my parents gave me a P.R. Cuatro (which is tuned G,D,A,E,B) like a bass, but 2 octaves higher and they are double strings, so the similarity of fingerings with the bass guitar is amazing, so thats my new toy. I like to sing and play all of this related intruments, but there's something special about the bass, it's the largest and lowest pitched string intrument. I don't know if it's the frequency of the sound, or the fact that it comes more natural to me, but I feel confortable playing it.

**Is Latin Jazz alive and well on the West Coast?**

Latin Jazz is, and will probably always stay, as a specialty music. I think it is a style aimed at people who know about music and want to hear good musicians play it. There is also a level associated with jazz musicians. It's like algebra or geometry in relation to general math or the NBA as oposed to college basketball. This doesn't mean that if you are not a musician you can't enjoy it, I'm just saying that the intention of the music is

Eliseo Borrero: bass, cuatro, zampoña, vocals

Joey D'León: congas, bongó, campana, güiro, shekere, maracas

Eric Jorgensen: trombone  
Ricardo "Tiki" Pasillas: timbales, bongó, campana on tracks 1,9

Joe Rotondi: piano on 1,2,8

Julius Meléndez: trumpet on 1,3,4,7

Jimmy Branly: timbales on 2,4. snare drum & cymbal on 6

Alex Acuña: timbales on 3,7

David Stout: trombone on 2

Willy Cadenas: coro on 1,5,9

Alberto Mirabal: coro on 1,5,9

Otmaro Ruíz: piano on 4,5,7,9

John Fumo: trumpet on 2,9

Ramón Flores: trumpet on 2,5,8,9

Ramón Yslas: cajón on 5

Robertito Meléndez: batás on 5

Jenny Chun: cello on 6

Charley Bisharat: violin on 6

Ramón "Mongo" Ramos: bongó & campana on 8

Cassio Duarte: brazilian percussion on 4



for a special audience, but that audience could be the majority of people if they're educated or trained for it. There is a big yearly Latin Jazz Festival at the Hollywood Bowl. I think Latin Jazz is growing in popularity around the world and people in general are training their ears. This is going to be the music of the century.

### **What is the name of your debut recording?**

My first release was "Amanecer Caribeño", which included also Latin Jazz and Salsa. Actually, when Cuban music was mixed with Jazz in New York by mostly Puertoricans, but including: Cubans of course, Jews, Dominicans and people from Latin America in general, that's when the name Salsa came around. I don't know why some people want to separate them now. There's no good Salsa without Jazz influence and vice versa. I don't like when the whole concert is too serious music, there's got to be some relaxed or fun tune, some comedy like Dizzy Gillespie used to do. After all it's supposed to be entertainment.

### **Is your recording available in stores? If not, where can our readers find it?**

The Prophecy is available in P.R. at Pentagrama & Music Zone stores (distribution by Aponte/V.I.Music), in New York at Casa Latina, online samples available at theorchard.com and available at Amazon.com/CD now, and it's been distributed by H.L. Distributors in Miami, FL. Amanecer Caribeño its out of print. We also sell them on our live concerts.

### **What musicians are you listening to these days?**

I listen to other Latin Jazz musicians of course, like Palmieri, Chucho Valdés, Humberto Ramírez, etc. But I'm also listening to some old Jazz like John Coltrane and some old Cuban Rumba, I like tribal stuff, it's intense. You got to get to the roots to be able to understand the music.

### **What can you tell us about the "marriage" between Bomba and Jazz?**

I think all of the Afro-Caribbean rhythms work good with jazz, because they share the same root. Bomba is a very special rhythm, because it's a perfect syncopation. The strong beats are basically off the "1" and the improvisation gravitates towards the "1". it's like a balance. I hope I'm not confusing everybody. When I say the "1" I mean: if you cut the music at a fast tempo 1,2,3,4,1,2,3,4. In most music like american rock or R&B usually the strongest beat is the down beat "1" or the "3". in Latin the strongest is the "4", it's like the "4" is where the strongest instrument (like the bass) lands. This doesn't mean that you can't play notes on the "1", but means that the landing notes are usually on the "4" or somewhere else than "1".

The P.R. Bomba is an African rhythm that got popular in Salsa as a variation of the traditional Guaguancó or Son rhythms. It is used like on "bridges", intros or endings. The traditional Bomba was just Bomba all the way and like most Afro music it was played only with barrell style drums and hollowed logs, and it's accompanied by dancers who interpret and mimic with their body the sound of the highest drum or the one that improvises (the quinto). Now, Bomba has found the way into Jazz . Almost every Latin Jazz band in P.R. or N.Y. uses Bomba-Jazz. Note: when I say Bomba I'm not referring to the part of "Timba Music" where the percussion stays and the bass does a boom-boom effect or to the hit by Azul Azul "La Bomba". I'm talking about the Afro-P.R. ancient rhythm.

### **What role has the island of Puerto Rico and its musicians played in the development/evolution of Latin Jazz?**

The Island of P.R. has produced many Jazz players. From Noro Morales, who wrote "María Cervantes", Juan Tizol, who wrote "Caravan" with Duke Ellington, Charlie & Eddie Palmieri, Ray Barretto, Papo Lucca, John Peña, Néstor Torres, Giovanni Hidalgo, Richie Flores, Humberto Ramírez, Charlie Sepulveda, Dave Valentín and other not so famous

names like Millito Cruz (guitar), Jorge Laboy (guitar), Milton Sesentón (piano), and the list goes on and on. Alex Acuña went from Perú to San Juan, then to L.A. "EL Negro" Hernández goes a lot more to P.R. than to Habana but that is because of political issues. Not only that, but a lot of musicians from different nationalities have chosen P.R. as their home base, because of its geo-political position. It's easy to get to Europe and New York and you are still in the Caribbean. No need for heater!!!

### **What's in the future for Eliseo Borrero?**

For my next project, I would like to keep writing in the same direction. I just heard the new CD from Ray Barretto (Ray Barretto and New World Spirit - Trancedance. Featuring James Moody and Los Papines. Record company: Circular Moves, 2000). and it's so ahead of its time (as usual). What I will do is put some interesting changes. I'm looking for space harmony, like Brazilian music or straight ahead Jazz. More dense than pop music, more embellishment, but all Latin "azuquita" (sugar), of course that takes a few more rehearsals but in the end it's good for everybody.

Hasta La Próxima!  
Thomas Peña  
Co-Editor

[Back to top](#)

[About Us](#) | [Credits](#) | [Contact Us](#)

Web Design : DMN Interactive : © 2001-2006 : [Latin Jazz Network](#)