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**A Cyber-Chat with Vocalist, Composer Jessie Marquez by Tomas Peña**

**TP: Congratulations on your debut release, Sana Locura. What is the significance of the title?**

JM: The title comes from a bolero that was composed for me by Jorge Perez Peña. Sana Locura describes love. However, it loses something in the translation. It could mean "sane madness" or "healthy abandon," however, neither of these descriptions seem to have the same poetic quality . . . Sana Locura also describes the spirit in which the recording was made. It was a personal and creative leap of faith.

**TP: Tell me about your formative years in Oregon and how you gravitated toward Cuban music.**

JM: We left San Juan, Puerto Rico when I was about four years old and moved to Eugene, Oregon (my mother grew up in Portland, Oregon). For the first few years we lived in an old farmhouse on the outskirts of town. I still have very vivid images of that house and of singing and dancing on my parents' bed, demanding their applause.

When I was eight years old, my parents divorced and my mother and I moved to San Francisco. She became good friends with a bohemian group of artists and performers. I had a number of "aunties" in the group and one of them was Margaret Burke, a young, beautiful and talented singer from the Midwest who taught me how to accompany myself on the guitar. I had a repertoire of folk, country, blues and spirituals that I sang at parties. I moved back to Eugene (Oregon) when I was eleven to live with my father, stepmother and baby brothers. I performed in a community theater, danced and sang in the high school jazz choir.

I was sixteen when I finished high school. I struck out on my own and lived in San Francisco, Barcelona and later New York where I studied at New York University. I graduated with honors from New York University and was on my way to becoming an anthropologist. In fact, I was awarded an internship by a professor from the University of Mexico to document the indigenous culture in Merida, Mexico. Before departing, I went home to work during the summer and save some money. Then I met my husband,

Donnie, became pregnant with my first son and abandoned my academic plans. I was twenty three when my son, Samuel was born. My second son, Jackson, was born three and half years later. When Sammy was a baby, I enrolled in some dance classes. One day, one of the conga players from the class told me the salsa group he was playing with was seeking a vocalist. I tried out and began singing with the band. I sang with the bandleader, Furnell Lopez and his group for a number of years. He incorporated me into a six-piece folkloric group called "Lo Nuestro," with musicians from Mexico and Peru. Despite the fact that I had not played the guitar he encouraged me to pick it up again and taught me how to play Cuban son, bolero, joropo, son huasteco, son veracruzano, cumbias, plenas, etc. We played at parties, festivals, clubs, schools, parks, libraries and correctional facilities. The guys in that band are like brothers to me.

Not long after I began singing with the salsa band (1996), I accompanied my father to Cuba to visit his boyhood home. He grew up in La Lisa, which used to be the countryside outside of Havana. It was a profound experience for me, seeing Cuba through my father's eyes. It felt deeply familiar. The gestures of the people, their attitude and sensibilities . . . Something resonated in me that I wanted to develop and express. After that, I knew I wanted to sing Cuban music.

**TP: Your grandmother had a major influence on you both musically and politically. In fact, you dedicated Sana Locura to your grandmother . . .**

My grandmother, Nani, and I were very close. My parents would drop me off at her house on Friday evenings and the two of us would spend quality time together. She was a tremendous cook, well versed in Italian, Spanish and Cuban cuisine. She taught me how to read Spanish and sew. She told me stories about her family's "Speakeasy" in Brooklyn and how beautiful the Cuban countryside was. There is a particular place in Cuba she called "her valley." She said it was the most beautiful place she has ever seen. I pay homage to my grandmother every day.

**TP: Another individual who has a significant influence on you is Angel Ervira Herrera, the musical director and voice instructor with Conjunto Folklorico Nacional. I found her description of your vocal style very humorous. She described you as a "white woman who sings like a black girl . . ." Obviously, she was making reference to the soulful quality of your voice . . .**

JM: Yes, maybe what she means is that I sing from my heart. Angela has been a wonderful teacher and Madrina (Godmother) to me. Furthermore, she has opened a lot of pathways for me.

**TP: Let's discuss the making of Sana Locura. One journalist described the recording as "the culmination of your search for your cultural identity" and "the fullest expression of whom you are and who you want to be." Would you say that is an accurate assessment of why you chose to make this recording?**

JM: I think those are fairly accurate statements. However, the story doesn't end there. My cultural identity will probably continue to grow, change and deepen depending on the circumstances in my life. But, certainly this CD is an expression of a part of my cultural history and my own will to create myself.

**TP: You traveled to Cuba in 2003 to lay the groundwork for Sana Locura then returned to Oregon to raise funds for travel expenses, the recording sessions, etc. You returned to Cuba in 2004 to record the album. During your stay you interacted with some of the finest musicians in Cuba. What are your most vivid recollections of the recording sessions and/or your visit to Cuba?**

JM: My most vivid memories are of the time we spent in the studio drinking rum, eating pork fricase and congri, telling jokes, the sound of La Charanga Habanera streaming in through the windows. We worked long hours for over a month but we had good time.

**TP: Judging from the results the long hours payed off. The repertoire consists of twelve colorful tracks that run the (Cuban) musical gamut: one guajira, five boleros or bolero combinations, two guagancos, two trovas, one son-timba and one salsa tune. Moreover, you composed "Dile Que Me Voy" and "La Muchacha Bailadora." The album has a beautiful flow. Who selected the material and arranged the material?**

JM: I selected the songs and Juan Carlos Marin arranged all the music. Juan Carlos, David Alfaro and Julito Padron produced the music. I naively thought a label would be interested in doing all the mixing, mastering, artwork, licensing, etc. However, I soon found out that things don't work that way. So, I did it all myself. As things turned out I am glad it worked out that way. I learned a lot in the process.

**TP: What recording and/or recordings are you listening to as we speak?**

JM: Let's see, there's Maraca, Celeste Mendoza, Billie Holiday, Isaac Delgado, Merceditas Valdes . . .

**TP: Who are some of your favorite musical artists - past and present?**

JM: In no particular order: those I mentioned previously and Benny More, Elena Burke, Ella Fitzgerald, Maria Teresa Vera, Marvin Gaye, Sierra Maestra, Jill Scott, Celia Cruz, Celina Gonzales, Omara Portuondo, Etta James, Armando Garzon, Gonzalo Rubalcaba, Jacqueline Castellanos, Issac Delgado, Olga Guillot, La Sonora Matancera, La Sonora Ponceña, Robert Johnson, La Lupe, Haila, Cubanismo, Stevie Wonder, Pablo Milanes, Ruben Blades, Aretha Franklin and Charles Mingus. Among many others!

**TP: It has been a pleasure speaking with you. Best of luck with Sana Locura.**

For additional information on Jessie Marquez and Sana Locura visit:

[www.sanalocura.com](http://www.sanalocura.com)

Tomas Peña - Co-Editor  
Latin Jazz Network  
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JESSIE MARQUEZ - SANA LOCURA  
2005 Independent Release

JESSIE MARQUEZ: voice.  
DAVID ALFARO: piano & keyboard.  
RAUL TOBIAS GIL GARCIA: electric bass, baby bass.  
ADEL GONZALEZ GOMEZ: congas, bongos, guiro, maracas, clave, chékere, catá.  
DAIRON GARCIA ALVAREZ: pailas.  
DANIEL GONZALEZ GIL: bongos, quinto.  
JULITO PADRON: trumpet, chorus, voice.  
JUAN CARLOS MARIN: trombone, chorus.  
DAVID SUAREZ MERLIN: tenor sax.  
NICA LAWTON: flute.  
ENRIQUE LUIS PEREZ PRIETO: chorus.  
NICK MARQUEZ: rap.

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

1. **Alborada Guajira**
2. **Juramento**
3. **Sana Locura**
4. **Este Son Homenaje**
5. **Sobre una tumba, una rumba**
6. **Capullito de Aleli**
7. **Dile que me voy**
8. **Alfonsina y el mar**
9. **Amame como soy**
10. **La muchacha bailadora**
11. **Si me comprendieras**
12. **Háblame de la rumba**



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