



RALPH IRIZARRY

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1. Can you tell us about your beginnings in Puerto Rico?



RALPH: "My family moved back to Puerto Rico (from New York) in 1970. I had been playing timbales for about a year and was able to play with local groups like Hermanos Rivera, Orquesta La Mundo, La Terriífica and others. After years I felt that being nuyorican in those days was not affording me the same opportunities as locals, so I moved back to New York."

2. Your work with Ray Barreto was another important step in your career, can you tell us about that period?

RALPH: "After playing with different charanga groups like América, Novedades, Típica New York and Chino y Conjunto Melao, in 1977 I was approached by Ray Barreto, who came to the Corso Nite Club at the recommendation of the manager Marty Arret. Ray said he enjoyed my performance and that he would call. I didn't receive a call until three months later which caught me totally by surprise. He did say he would call, but after three months I though he'd forgot about me. Anyway, 2 weeks later we were recording "Ricanstruction", and the rest is history. I soon turned pro musician after having to leave Merril Lynch to do a Venezuela 3 week tour. I've been a full time musician since then."

3. And then of course, I have to ask you about your longtime collaboration with Ruben Blades y Seis del Solar?

RALPH: "In 1983, after 5 recordings and numerous world tours with Ray Barreto, I felt that because of lack of work Ray was sort of going into a more commercial direction. These were probably painful times for Ray, as he was always about the music and the jobs always seemed to be there. At this point I was very happy to hear that Rubén Blades -who was going into a different sound than with Willie Colon- was interested - after some recommendations- in me. It was a difficult decision to leave Ray, but in April of 1983 I became a founding member of "6 del Solar." "Buscando América" was the first CD we recorded, and another 6 or 7 followed. I performed with Rubén for about 15 years."

4. Who are the main influences in your music?

RALPH: "As far as influences are concerned, I had two that were not Timbaleros. The first was a baritone sax player in Puerto Rico, who taught me how to read percussion charts. He is currently the mayor of Juana Diaz in Puerto Rico. The second was Freddie Dawud Waits, a great jazz and Motown sound drummer who taught me music theory. They were very important in my development as a musician. Then of course you have the timbaleros. I think the most important ones were Orestes Vilató, Tito Puente and Nicky Marrero. Of course there are many more, too many to mention them all."



5. What are your plans for the near future, are you already working on new

material?

RALPH: "After 15 years with Rubén Blades the clear next step was to become some sort of soloist. In 1996 I started a Latin jazz group called Timbalaye. After 2 CDs on the Shanachie label -which have created a loyal following- I can say the group is finding a world wide audience, having traveled to Europe, the Caribbean, Central America, the U. S. and in October 2000 Asia. Whether or not my next CD will be on the Shanachie label is yet to be discussed with the label. Regardless, in November I will start looking for new material. I have also been invited by Chucho Valdés to attend the Havana Jazz Festival in December 2000. I do plan on attending this great showcase for me."

6. What do you think of the actual state of development of Latin Jazz music and/or musicians?

RALPH: "I feel that Latin jazz record sales don't match up to the broad appeal and excitement that people all over the world feel for this specific genre of music. However, I think its only a matter of time before this acceptance reflects on record sales. In my opinion, this instrumental form of music is perfect for the world stage. I see a tremendous future for Latin jazz."

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