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Conversation with Robert Rodriguez



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An On-Line Chat with pianist, composer, arranger - Robert Rodriguez (of the Rodriguez Brothers)

by Tomas Peña

It's obvious that your parents, particularly your father (drummer Roberto Rodriguez) has had a tremendous impact on you and Michael. In the liner-notes of your CD you specifically give credit to your father for introducing you to Cuban music and jazz. Just how did your father influence your music, life and career?

My Father always played good music in our house. From a very young age my brother and I were introduced to the masters of jazz, Brazilian and Afro Cuban jazz. Besides playing those records for us, he took to his gigs and surrounded us in a musical environment.

If possible, describe the moment when you came to the realization that you were destined to become a musician.

Michael and I started studying musical instruments as soon as we could talk and walk. I studied the alto sax, percussion, and the piano, while Michael studied the guitar and the trumpet. Once we entered highschool we focused mainly on our primary instruments, Piano and Trumpet.

Growing up in a musical house I never thought about becoming anything else other than a musician. I always wanted to be like my father. But I do remember when I was about 11, I listened to Paquito D' Rivera and Tania Maria and I felt euphoric. I knew then I wanted to become a musician and bring that kind of happiness to people.

How did you gravitate toward your respective instruments?

Well, I actually wanted to be a drummer like my father. I studied drums for years and listened to all the greats, from Max Roach to Jack de Johnnette. However, the only way I could play with my father was with the piano. We would jam sometimes with my brother on trumpet and I would take care of the harmony. Besides, my father always encouraged me to pursue the piano in addition to playing the drums. Mainly because of all the possibilities the piano can bring such as composing and arranging.

Growing up there were never pianist around to jam with but tons of drummers, so I kind of got pushed in that direction, which was I am grateful for. Michael started playing the guitar at a young age because we had it laying around the house, but when Michael reached middle school the band director asked him to choose an instrument which he could play in the symphonic band. The trumpet was the first instrument he picked up and by the hour he was already playing little melodies. I think it was love at first sight!

Describe your musical education and the transition from fledgling musicians to professional musicians.

Both Michael and I studied from a very young age privately. We then continued our studies at the New World School of The Arts in Miami and later attended the University of Miami. Michael actually did 2 years there and 2 years at the New School in New York. We started performing and appearing on TV shows around the age of 13. All throughout high school we worked gigs, sometimes with our father. When I got to the University I started to play with Ira Sullivan and that was a school in itself. I later did professional gigs with Giovanni Hidalgo, Ed Calle and Arturo Sandoval.

Collectively, you have performed with a number of critically acclaimed artists: Giovanni Hidalgo, Arturo Sandoval, Quincy Jones, the Chico O' Farrell Big Band, the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra, etc. How did you manage to establish such impressive credentials at such a young age?

The music business as all know is very tough and competitive. As an artist one has to have something to put on the table so to speak. There has to be something in one's playing that is attractive to other musicians. I like to believe it is because of our hard work, dedication (to our instruments) and lots of practice!

This question is for Robert. You just completed a recording with the multi-talented trumpet virtuoso, Arturo Sandoval. What was it like working with Arturo?

In November of 2002 we recorded "Trumpet Evolution". It was a big project for Arturo as he took on the sound of 19 trumpet masters and played in their style. I listened to the material that we were going to record ahead of time. The challenge was for me was to play in all the different styles and still maintain my voice.

Let's discuss your latest project - Introducing the Rodriguez Brothers. What was the inspiration for some of the tunes you composed and arranged?

I wrote "Gitmo's Groove" for my father being from Guantanamo. The term gitmo was a slang term for the military personnel who lived on the American Guantanamo Base. One day when I was visiting my dad in Miami we decided to jam. The jam gave birth to this 4 bar base line which is the basis of the tune.

I wrote "Lulu's Song" for my mother, Marilu. One night after a NY jam session I came home and wrote this bolero and while thinking about my Mother.

"El Monje" was actually written for the Thelonious Monk Composition competition. However, I never submitted it. It was the year the competition featured percussionists. Incidentally, Samuel Torres who plays on my CD was awarded 2nd place in the competition.

"Epiphany" was written during my last year at the University of Miami. I wanted to write something for my senior recital and one night that tune popped into my head like magic. It made me realize that sometimes one just has to let the music flow and create itself.

In the liner-notes you describe "Introducing the Rodriguez Brothers" as a celebration of Cuban and American jazz as well as the duality of being born in the United States and having cultural roots in (Guantanamo) Cuba." Please

elaborate.

The music that we recorded stems from all of our influences. Being born in NY Michael and I were geographically in the Mecca of Jazz and were privileged enough to be exposed to that music. My father and grandfather brought with them from Cuba the traditions and the music of Afro Cuba. So we had the best of both worlds while growing up.

How do you define your music?

My music is a cross pollination of Jazz, Afro Cuban Music and Classical music. But more than that I hope that it touches people's hearts and minds in a manner that only music can.

Is there any particular reason why you chose to record as a duo rather than pursuing individual projects?

My brother and I are very close, being so close in age we were always best friends and have established a musical and spiritual connection which led to the recording of this CD.

How is your recording doing thus far? Is it available in stores? If not, please let our readers know where they can purchase your recording.

The Recording is currently available at CD Baby.com. In addition, it is available through our website: rodriguezmusic.com

The CD is getting generous air-play here in New York as well as in Miami, Denver, Puerto Rico and various other public radio stations. Because of the current record industry crisis, Michael and I decided to put the record out independently.

Unquestionably, the future looks bright for the Rodriguez Brothers. Any specific plans, tours, upcoming performances, new projects in the works?

Michael just finished recording with bass player Charlie Haden (a tribute to Armando Manzanero with Gonzalo Rubalcaba, Ignacio Berroa and others) and will possibly be on tour with him this summer. We are currently booking for the upcoming year and those dates will be available on our website soon.

What currents musical artists intrigue you and why? What CD's are on rotation in your CD player as we speak?

Keith Jarrett has always intrigued me. His genius piano playing artistry and sense of discovery have always given me inspiration. Currently I find my self listening to more classical composers like are Stravinsky, Shostikovich, Ravel, Legeti, Prokofiev and the list goes on... I like to keep an open mind and listen to new and original music.

Thank You and congratulations on your latest project. Introducing the Rodriguez Brother is very impressive debut recording. Please stay in touch and keep us abreast of future products, tour dates, etc.

Interview conducted by Tomas Pena (1/13/04).

To know more about The Rodriguez Brothers, visit their website: www.rodriguezmusic.com

Tracks: (click on titles to listen)

1. **Gitmo's Groove**
2. **Topsy Turvy**
3. **Sundance**
4. **El Monje**

5. **Lulu's Song**
6. **Merry-Go-Round**
7. **Luminescence**
8. **Epiphany**



Introducing THE RODRIGUEZ BROTHERS

Produced by Robert Rodriguez

RodBros Music - 2003

All compositions written by Robert Rodriguez except "Sundance" written by Michael Rodriguez.

Musicians:

Michael Rodriguez - Trumpet & Flugelhorn

Robert Rodriguez - Piano

Carlos Henriquez - Bass

Adam Cruz - Drums

Samuel Torres - Percussion on 1,3,4,5,7,8

Robert Rodriguez Biography

Pianist/Composer, Robert Rodriguez was born on January 11, 1978 in New York City. Inspired by his father who is a drummer, Robert began to pursue music from a very early age. Robert studied piano and percussion at the New World School of The Arts and proceeded to achieve his Bachelor's of Music from the University of Miami. Through New World School of The Arts and the University of Miami, he was given the opportunity to perform with Jerry Bergonzi, Jon Faddis, Kenny Wheeler, and Maria Schneider. Robert has worked professionally with Giovanni Hidalgo, Ed Calle, Ray Vega and has had the privilege of recording alongside Arturo Sandoval, Chick Corea, Steve Turre, Dave Samuels, and Claudio Roditti on a live concert entitled Jam Miami. Robert also recorded on some of the soundtracks to the HBO film "For Love or Country - The Arturo Sandoval Story". In November Robert recorded on Arturo Sandoval's latest record, "Trumpet Evolution" which was produced by Quincy Jones. He currently tours/performs with the Rodriguez Brothers group and with Arturo Sandoval.

Michael Rodriguez Biography

Trumpeter/composer, Michael Rodriguez was born on July 14, 1979 in Queens, New York. Like his brother Robert, Michael was also inspired to pursue music as a career by their father. Michael studied at the New World School of the Arts in Miami, Florida and continued his studies at the University of Miami. After completing two years at the University of Miami, he decided to transfer to the New School University in New York where he received his B.A. Michael has performed and toured with Pianist Eric Reed and has recorded on his latest record entitled "Happiness". Michael has worked with Clark Terry, Bobby Watson, Quincy Jones, Joe Lovano, Toshiko Akiyoshi Orchestra, Chico O'Farrill Orchestra, Lincoln Center Orchestra and has traveled with the Carnegie Hall Jazz Band, Carla Bley Band, Harry Conick jr., and the Smithsonian Jazz Orchestra. Both Michael and Robert currently reside in New York City.

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