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A Dialogue with Trumpet Player, Producer, Composer, Arranger - Tony Lujan - by Tomas Peña

Prior to my conversation with Tony Lujan I had heard (or read) a rumor to the effect that Lujan was NEVER seen in public without his trumpet in hand. As things turned out, the rumor is a bit of a stretch. That said, Lujan readily admits that he is never far from his "AXE."

Born in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Tony Lujan began playing the trumpet at the age of ten. During his early years he participated in numerous solo and ensemble competitions as well as the Albuquerque Youth Symphony.

After hearing Clark Terry at a Manzano High School clinic in 1971 Lujan came to the realization that he wanted to be a jazz musician. Upon recognizing his incredible musical gift, Terry took the young Lujan under his tutelage and guided his career. Lujan also studied with Woody Shaw, Cat Anderson, Freddie Hubbard, Bobby Shew, and Carl Saunders among others.

Lujan has performed live with the big bands of Clark Terry, Gerald Wilson, Bill Holman, Ray Charles, Peter Herbolzheimer, and Bobby Burgess. Also, with Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett, Robert Goulet, Wayne Newton, Debbie Reynolds, Bob Hope, and Luis Miguel. Other notable artists and entertainers he has performed with include Santana, Ozomatli, Aretha Franklin, Tito Puente, Eddie Palmieri, Steve Turre Shell Choir, Francisco Aguabella, Poncho Sanchez, Walter Norris, Louis Bonilla, William Cepeda, Henry Franklyn, and Puerto Rico's Batacumbele.

Lujan has played the lead trumpet in the national tours of musicals such as A Chorus Line (directed by Michael Bennett, starring Tony Award winner Donna McKechnie), Sweet Charity (directed by Bob Fosse), 42nd Street, The Most Fellow, and West Side Story.

He has also recorded for major motion picture soundtracks in such films as Salsa, Mambo Kings, In the Line of Fire, War and Remembrance, The Marrying Man, and Chaplin. He has also appeared on television programs such as The Drew Carey Show, The Paul Rodriguez Show, Dame Una Quebrada in Puerto Rico, and The Bronco Billy Show in Slovenia.

Additionally, Tony has given instruction at private clinics and schools such as the University of New Mexico, University of Texas at El Paso, Universidad de Mexico, the Royal Academy of Music, the Sherborne School of Music in England, Bundess Jazz Orchestra in Germany, and Taller De Music of Barcelona, Spain. He also taught at the University of Southern California, California State University at Los Angeles, the Dick Grove School of Music, Cal Arts, University of New Hampshire, San Dimas High School and for Massachusetts Public Schools. He also has been the Director of the Cape Cod Jazz Youth Orchestra, and teaches Jazz theory, composition, arranging, and Trumpet privately. He is currently an instructor at the Academy of Music in Osterville. Lujan's most recent project, Tribute (Bella Records, 2004) is a brilliant homage to many of his trumpet masters past and present.

I hope the readers of Latin Jazz Network find this interview as interesting and revealing as I did. As you will see, Tony's honesty and commitment to his music are beyond reproach.

TP: Let's begin by either confirming or dispelling a myth that has surrounded your name for years. Is it true that you have never been seen (in public) without your trumpet?

TL: Heh, Heh, Heh, I love it. That is the benefit of playing the trumpet. It's a small instrument that you can carry with you at all times, but to say that I've never been seen without my trumpet is quite amusing and complimentary. I was born to play and, if you leave your "AXE" in the closet you're going to miss out on all the fun.

Back in 1983-84 I went to the Four Queens Hotel in Las Vegas, Monday night Jazz sessions with host Allan Grant to check out Clark Terry, Louie Bellson and Al Grey. It was an Ellington Tribute, and Clark invited me to sit in. I explained to him that I had left my horn at home. His reply? Vegas isn't that big. Go get it. "What kind of musician are you?"

From that day forward my trumpet was like my American Express card, I never left home without it, and because I always have my horn with me I have been able to participate in jam sessions that I otherwise would have missed out on. Once, after playing at the Heineken Jazz Festival with William Cepeda, we all went out to a bar and all the Cat's were out. It was Horacio "El Negro" Hernandez, Eddie "Gua Gua" Rivera, Eric Figueroa, Giovanni Hidalgo, Juan Pablo Torres and myself. You can imagine what a blast we had. Just last week I sat in with Ozomatli, which was a total Blast. Another thing that I preach is, when you get home take the instrument out of the case. You tend to practice more if the horn is out of the case.

TP: Now that we have cleared that up, let's discuss Tribute, your latest project. As the title implies, the album is a tribute to your trumpet heros. In a recent interview you mentioned that you were unable to include all of your heros due to budget concerns. Name some of the trumpet players that were left out of the recording. Hypothetically, what compositions would you have chosen for Louis Armstrong, Tom Harrell, Bobby Shew and some of the other trumpet players who were left out of the mix?

TL: I wanted to record When It's Sleepy Time Down South for Satchmo, with Clark Terry singing the Vocals and me on the plunger behind him in a Dixieland style. Later breaking into a Mambo with Clark scatting Latino Mumbles and the horns playing a typical Salsa riff. For Bobby Shew I wanted to record Red Snapper and invite him as a special guest as well. Herb Alpert, Casino Royal in a Bomba rhythm. We had an arrangement ready to go for Tom Harrell, Terrestris. That was laid out with the digeridoo into a funk drumbeat with the congas and bata. Pedro Martinez, Vinny Valentino on guitar and Edsel Gomez on the B3 organ, and Negro on drums. We rehearsed this one, but ran out of time and money.

TP: You made it a point to include Clark Terry, Woody Shaw and Freddie Hubbard. These three trumpet masters had a tremendous impact on you both

personally and professionally. Could you talk about them?

TL: I first met Clark back in 1972. He was an invited guest and clinician at my high school. He spent three days teaching, rehearsing and performed a concert. There was enough time to relax and ask him a variety of questions. He taught me how to circular breath and most important, he talked about how important it was to learn to play the Blues, the important aspects of swing. And the growing processes of: Tone, Time, Technique, Rhythm, Melody, Harmony, Emulate, Assimilate, Innovate Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Also, the importance of mastering each process in order to achieve the ultimate level of Musicianship. In other words, Musical Freedom = "JAZZ"

Freddie Hubbard: I met Freddie a few months after returning from my first European tour. I was one of the members of the Clark Terry All Youth Big Band. Some of the other members were: Conrad Herwig, Byron Stripling, Branford Marsalis, Michael Baker, John Campbell and many other young musicians. In 1982 I was invited to perform at the Telluride Jazz Festival. It was a four-day event and I was very excited because Freddie Hubbard was on the roster. When I finally met Freddie, we immediately hit it off. We were off to a flying start. Hanging 24-7. In fact, we still keep in contact. When I lived in Los Angeles, we would get together on occasion to talk Chops and Harmony and trade trumpet ideas. He was a great inspiration. I learned the definition of FIRE from listening to Freddie at his live performances. He always played with Spirit, Soul and Sass and when he wanted Fire, look out!

Woody Shaw: I met Woody when I was living in Barcelona. We were working in separate groups at a festival in Terazza, a village just outside of Barcelona. He was working with Joe Henderson, Tony Reedus, Woody Shaw, Mulgrew Miller and Stafford James. WOW! the concert was unbelievable. I was an immediate Woody Freak. I started listening to everything that Woody was on. He was truly the last trumpet player to change the direction of the trumpet, harmonically. From that first encounter, every time Woody was in town, we would encounter one another in clubs and I would pick his brain for some harmonic information. He was not open to the idea at first but after he heard my feeble attempt to imitate him, he was more than eager to help. He opened the world of the trumpet to the study of fourths. It is quite difficult to play the trumpet in fourths but with much Practice, Patience and Perseverance, one can accomplish this goal.

TP: You have stated that assembling the musicians for Tribute was a relatively easy task. The implication being that it was an easy task because, "There are only a few musicians who play Bebop and understand Latin." What does it entail for a musician to be proficient in both genres, Jazz and Latin?

As they say: "If you have to ask, you'll never know." Yeah right! One must understand the rhythm patterns of the Afro-cuban tradition. From Cha Cha Cha, Mambo, Rumba, Bolero, Salsa, Son Montuno, Guaguanco, Masacote, Merengue, Bomba. And also to understand the rhythmical structure of how the Clave fits in with the timbale, conga, bongo, bass, and piano patterns. Martin Cohen published a book, "Understanding Latin Rhythms." Rebecca Mauleon also did a wonderful job of clarifying what every instrument should play in order to make a Latin rhythm sound and be aesthetically correct. I use and study from both of these books and also have had the good fortune of working with some of the best drummers, timbaleros and percussionist. They were always helpful. I was always asking questions and taking hand drum lessons. This helped my understanding of the rhythms and tradition of the Latin Afro-Cuban idiom. I can remember many times traveling through Europe and in the back of the bus, Paoli Mejia, Jose Clausell, "Piro" Rodriguez, Javier Oquendo, Alberto Menendez and myself. We would be playing rhythms on tables, windows, wine bottles, coke cans, with Herman Olivera singing, and Eddie and Joe Santiago would be up at the front of the bus listening to Cachao. In other words, all of the information is already out there. Find it, study it and apply it to your music.

Music is like mathematics. There is a correct way to play and write music. $X+Y=Z$. However, Jazz/Jazz Latino is not easy. There are many rules that you must follow in order for the music to be correct. The same discipline goes for Be-Bop. You must understand the language of Jazz. Twelve Bar Blues, Sixteen Bar Blues, Rhythm Changes, Coltrane

Changes, Thirty Two Tune, Major and Minor ii V7 I and Tritone -subs, Secondary Dominants and all the Modes, Major, Minor, Melodic, Harmonic, Pentatonic, Diminished, Wholetone, Diminished wholetone scales and many more, patterns in all twelve keys. Many transcriptions of recorded solos analyze scores and transcribe many tunes. How to play the Blues never using the Blues scale The Re-harmonization of a tune etc. Every Jazz/ Jazz Latino musician should have some knowledge of some type of rhythm instrument, be it drums, congas, shekere, campana and, a knowledge of the piano whether you play piano or not. This is essential. When I'm writing an arrangement, I take all this info into account. Then I add my own creativity. Some Latin recordings from jazz cats that I have heard on the radio, sound Latin but they are missing the most important ingredient of Latin Music. CLAVE. And some Latinos who attempt to play Be-Bop are missing elements of swing and harmonic information. All the musicians on Tribute are qualified and prepared to deliver in both genres. There are others as well who fit in this category. Whether White, Black or Latino, with proper training, study, determination, discipline, perseverance and application, anyone can learn both Jazz/Jazz Latino.

Cuban music has been in Europe and other parts of the world and they have had access to this country more so than Americans. A great example of what I mean: When you listen to Clark sing Mumbles he'll swagger in and out of French to German to English, and it sounds French and German and English, but it's Mumbles. Clarity and definition are very important. When in doubt do your research and/or ask for advice. Before I recorded anything in Jazz Latino under my name, and this is after years of playing and recording with many of the Jazz/Jazz Latino greats, and studying many types of music, I moved to Puerto Rico for six months to really feel the music. It was the best thing I ever did in terms of learning how to understand and really FEEL the music.

TP: The personnel for Tribute are a who's who of young and established musicians: Conrad Herwig, Yosvanny Terry, Miguel Zenon, Richie Flores, John Benitez, Edsel Gomez, Dafnis Prieto, Luis and Robert Quintero. The atmosphere must have been quite electric in the studio.

Actually the rehearsals were more electrifying than the record date. When I finally hear, the new arrangements come to fruition, that is exciting as hell. By the time we get to the studio and after much preparation, the studio atmosphere is quite relaxed. All these cats are well prepared and have great studio chops. There were no young cubs on this date. Nardis was two takes, we kept the second take, Intrepid Fox was tough, we did four takes, the middle section where Dafnis plays his drum solo was tough to stay in Clave and sustain the intensity. Forever my Love, Tomorrow's Destiny, Ceora, Daahoud, two takes, we kept the second take. Sheba, Short Story, Tin Tin Deo, all two takes, and we kept the second take as well. All the out takes are great. Maybe one day I'll release the out takes as a separate recording.

TP: Let's conduct an informal analysis of the tracks you chose to represent each artist: Miles - Nardis, Intrepid Fox - Freddie Hubbard, Tomorrow's Destiny - Woody Shaw, Ceora - Lee Morgan, Daahoud - Clifford Brown, Sheba - Clark Terry, Short Story - Kenny Dorham and Tin Tin Deo - Dizzy Gillespie.

Miles- It was between Nardis, Petits Machins or In a Silent Way. Freddie Hubbard - Intrepid Fox, Gibraltar or Thermo. Woody Shaw -Tomorrow's Destiny, Little Red's Fantasy or In Case You Haven't Heard. Lee Morgan - Ceora, Sidewinder or Speed Ball. Clifford Brown- Daahoud, Swingin' or Blues Walk. Clark Terry - Sheba, Kenny Dorham - Short Story, Una Mas, Pedro's Time. Dizzy Gillespie - Tin Tin Deo, A Night in Tunisia and Be-Bop. As you can see, the decision making process was tough. The only tunes that I was set on were Sheba and Forever My Love. I spent a lot of time thinking about the succession of each tune. All these tunes are currently in my quintet book, quite enough there to record another CD.

TP: On another note, you have chosen to go your own way musically speaking. What are the advantages and disadvantages of producing, arranging, composing, performing, mixing, mastering, promoting and distributing your own recordings?

Many cats out there are doing their best to keep this form of music alive and continue to experiment. The only way to get this done is to be able to compose, arrange, perform, mix, master, and produce your own product. Then come marketing and booking. The Jazz/Jazz Latino sales are a small percentage in the big picture of music sales. If it weren't for a lot of Cat's going out on a limb, great music might never get heard or exist. Music is a labor of Love, there is much hard work and commitment that go into making a finished a CD. The advantages are that you can be as creative as you want. I'm sure that everyone would love to have a FAT record deal that would set one up with tour support, manager, booking agent and a large budget. That is not taking place any longer. Most great Jazz Latino and Jazz music has always been on the smaller labels. It is sad that our music does not receive more support from the larger labels. Jazz Latino has some of the most complex rhythms, harmonic structures. Moreover, you can superimpose any melody you want over it to top off this rhythmical, harmonic foundation. The disadvantages are that you have to work at every step of the process, and it takes away from your time on your horn, practicing, arranging and composing. Imagine what we could accomplish if we had the support that the Rock Bands have. Your typical rock band gets minimum \$500,000 or up to record a single album. That is just to record, and they take six to nine months to complete a record. Jazz/Jazz Latino Musicians are expected to nail their parts the first or second time. We recorded Tribute in two twelve-hour days. Percussion over dubs and strings were on a separate day. With a larger label, budget, marketing, etc., we could really educate the world and provide them some music of substance. It all comes down to money and sales.

TP: In a recent interview you spoke extensively about your decision to continue residing in Boston (Cape Cod) despite the obvious disadvantages. Hypothetically speaking, if you were able to relocate, where would you choose to live?

TL: Both New York and Los Angeles would be great. Both musical communities provide great musicians, and a commercial environment to make a living. In the studios, television, radio, the theater and live performances. It is really tough to make a living on jazz alone, but we must also rely on a commercial scene as well. The best scenario would be to live on the Cape and tour from here.

TP: Name some of the musicians and recordings that you enjoy listening too purely for pleasure.

I like classical music to soothe the soul. Mozart, Ravel, Wagner, Mahler, Berlioz, Verdi, Mendelssohn, Vivaldi, Shoenberg, Tchaikovsky, Stravinsky, Chopin. I also enjoy listening to Raphael Mendez and his contribution to the trumpet. He is amazing. Maurice Andre is another of my favorites. The Three Tenors, Luciano Pavorotti, Jose Carreras and Placido Domingo. Andre Bocelli. I also like to listen to Big Band Music like Basie, Ellington, Bill Holman, Buddy Rich, Stan Kenton, and vocalists like Billy Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, Betty Carter, Sarah Vaughn, Carmen Mc Rae, Nancy Wilson. Tito Puente, Los Papines, Muñequitos de Matanzas and Eddie Palmieri. Monk, Bird, Coltrane, Miles, Hubbard, Lee Morgan, Blakey, Mingus. As far as the young "Hip Stuff" I really dig Ozomatli. These Cats are writing some NEW Material for the ears. I like how they fuse together Middle Eastern with Latino, Funk, Hip-Hop and Rap. I also really dig the record that Robby Ameen and Negro did together (At the Third World War). In addition, I enjoy the music of Salic Keith, Vins, Seal, Tower of Power and Santana. And on Saturdays I try to check out the Celtic Sojourn with Brian O'Donovan. That type of music can be very uplifting. I like some folk music, and different World music. Liliana has gotten me into traditional Japanese music, and she educates me about the rock groups of the 60's- 80's. I missed a lot of that! I don't discriminate on musical style alone. I think Ellington said it best: "There are two kinds of music. GOOD and BAD."

TP: Do you have any plans to tour in the near future? We have a mutual friend (promoter Ellie Shuman) who is very enthusiastic about having you perform in San Miguel Allende, Mexico. How are those plans going?

TL: Yes, I would love to tour more. Salvador Tercero from Sala De Audio is currently booking some concerts in Mexico City. San Luis Potosi and Ellie are putting together a

concert in her hometown, San Miguel de Allende. A contact of mine from Panama is putting together a mini-tour for 2005 in Panama, Costa Rica, and Colombia. I believe that the concert in Panama is a tribute to Victor Vitin Paz. I have discussed some concert dates in Albuquerque, my hometown with people there. There are other shows in the works in Los Angeles and Boston. After 9/11 the Jazz scene really took a dive. The budget for a Jazz/Latin Jazz show practically vanished. Surely, these promoters and club owners cannot expect us to work for free. The Tribute personnel is an all-star band.

TP: Are there any up and coming musicians that strike your fancy?

TL: That is the beauty of evolution, There is always someone coming up. One of my personal favorites is saxophonist Miguel Zenon. His musicianship along with his attitude will take him far in this business. I met him at Wally's, a club in Boston. From the moment that I met him and heard him play I could see nothing but greatness in the future for him. I immediately contracted him to record his first recording in NY "You Don't Know What Love Is." Another of my favorites is saxophonist, Felipe Salles, He arranged "Forever My Love" on Tribute. Felipe played in my Boston-based band. I really admire his musicianship and arranging and compositional skills. He also has become a good friend and will be someone to contend with in the future. Then you have Serafin Aguilar, from Los Angeles, WOW! What trumpet chops he has. I first met him when he was 16 years old, I was living in Los Angeles at the time, he studied with me off and on and is constantly improving. I'm afraid to teach him anymore, because as they say "The student will surpass the master." He is doing a wonderful job covering the trumpet chair with Poncho Sanchez. I really enjoy Luis Perdomo, he plays like a true jazz musician. His Latin chops are pure Fire. And last but not least LOOK OUT for my 15 year old student Matt Joseph. He already has a double hi C and can play the Blues and has Great Classical Chops. I predict nothing but Great things for him in the near future.

TP: It seems that Miguel Zenon's name is on everyone's lips these days. I had the pleasure of interviewing Miguel and, considering his amazing talent, he is incredibly humble. Also, I have had the pleasure of seeing him perform at The Jazz Gallery on numerous occasions. I am amazed at his growth as a musician, composer and arranger. Switching gears, I'd like to conclude the interview with a very profound statement you made during a recent interview. You said, "I personally feel that I have not created anything new. I'm just in a constant search of self and enjoying every minute of it." My question is this, can you define "new?"

TL: I was implying to the Harmonic sense of the TRUMPET. I personally feel that Woody Shaw was the last trumpet player who changed the direction of the trumpet, as Miles did in the 60's. That is a tough nut to crack. It has to come from within. It takes many years of rhythm and harmonic knowledge and study, in conjunction with discipline and drive to search for (and discover) something new. Maybe I have already created something NEW. I don't dwell on that too much. I concentrate on today. Yesterday is gone forever. As they say. "Yesterday is the Past, Tomorrow is the Future and Today is the Present. That's why they call it the Gift of Life". "Lo que pasó, Ya pasó." Adelante.

TP: Congratulations Tony, Tribute is truly a work of art. I highly recommend it to all of our readers.

More info about Tony Lujan at: www.tonylujan.com

Tomas Peña - Co-Editor
Latin Jazz Network
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TONY LUJAN - TRIBUTE
2004 Bella Records

Musicians:

Musicians: Tony Lujan (trumpet, flugelhorn), Yosvanni Terry (tenor sax), Miguel Zenon (alto sax), Conrad Herwig (trombone), Edsel Gomez (piano), John Benitez (bass), Dafnis Prieto (drums), Richie Flores (congas, bongo, shekere, shaker, guiro, campana), Luisito Quintero (djembe, maracas, palo), Robertito Quintero (cajon)

Felipe Salles (conductor); Laura Arpianinen, Anna Basis, E.J. Lee, Eva Leon (violin); Elizabeth Jaffe, Irena Momchilova (viola), Ren Ariizumi (cello)

Tracks: (click on titles to listen)

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Nardis | 6. Daahoud |
| 2. Intrepid Fox | 7. Sheba |
| 3. Forever My Love | 8. Short Story |
| 4. Tomorrow's Destiny | 9. Tin Tin Deo |
| 5. Ceora | |



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