



Blogcritics is an online magazine, a community of writers and readers from around the globe.

Publisher: [Eric Olsen](#)



REVIEW

Music Review: Juan Pablo Torres - *Romantic Cuba*

Written by [Big Geez](#)

Published July 02, 2007



Reminiscent of Pérez Prado and moonlit Havana nights, Cuban dance music is alive and well — or at least it is on *Romantic Cuba*, a new compilation on the Malanga label. The album, which stars the late Cuban trombonist Juan Pablo Torres, is actually two complete albums in one. It combines 1975's *Mangle* and 1981's *Grupo Algo Nuevo* — and just for the record, both were indeed recorded in Havana.

The Cuban-born Torres, who died in 2005, was one of the leading lights of Latin music for three decades. Although his name might not be too familiar to US jazz fans, he was a talented and well-regarded musician with a number of albums to his credit, and worked with a lot of well-known artists through the years, including Arturo Sandoval, Paquito D'Rivera, Dizzy Gillispie, and Charles Aznavour.

All the selections on this album embrace the theme of romantic Latin music, but there is a clear delineation between the two sets of songs so it's natural to consider them separately. The first 12 cuts (which are from the earlier issue) feature the presence of a guest artist - pianist Pedro Coto Montalbán - who joins in with Torres and the EGREM orchestra, and his piano is pretty much front and center on every cut. Torres seems to be content to just direct the orchestra and blend his own play into the sound of the full group, which includes a string section.



All but one of the songs from this segment are boleros (the dance, not the famous song) and provide a lush listening experience that will have you dreaming of tropical beaches. Almost every cut was enjoyable, especially "Cuenta Conmigo" and "Mangle", but my favorite was probably the first cut, "[Si Te Contara](#)". It gives the listener a sound with a soft Latin beat that is perfectly representative of this group of songs. It features Montalbán's skilled, confident piano work, backed by the depth of a full orchestra, and the result is an addictive listening experience.

The last 8 selections on the album were recorded a few years later, and were the result of Torres deciding to form his own smaller group, Algo Nuevo, with several of his musical friends. His own playing is much more in evidence here, and he also changed focus a little, as most of these cuts are for the Súper-Son dance form. The music is much lighter in tone and livelier than the first bunch, with occasional vocalizations, clapping hands, and a more spontaneous feel. The Latin beat is also kicked up several notches, with congas and other drums taking over a lot of the rhythm.

In this group we also see the appearance of several well-known Latin standards, such as "Bésame Mucho" and "Malagueña", but with a fiery pace to their arrangements that provides something new. Good stuff. My favorite of this group was probably "[Chimbombo](#)". It's a spirited piece filled with infectious percussive play.

Simply put, I liked this album a lot. It's not only an enjoyable listening experience, but it also evokes the spirit of the era of big band Latin music. (And it's a double too!) Highly recommended.

1. [Si Te Contara](#) [Bolero]
2. Añorado Encuentro [Bolero]
3. Sí, Déjame Mirarte [Bolero]
4. Mangle [Bolero Tropical]
5. Pequeña Serenata Diurna [Canción]
6. Cuenta Conmigo [Bolero]
7. Terrible Sueño [Bolero]
8. Y Es Verdad [Bolero]
9. En Los Días Invernales [Bolero]
10. Tonada N° 1 [Bolero Cha]
11. ¿Por Qué No Te Besó? [Bolero]

16. Para Vigo Me Voy/Frenesí/El Bodeguero [Súper-Son]
17. Siboney [Súper-Son]
18. Son Naciente [Súper-Son]
19. Dame un Traguito [Súper-Son]
20. Cumbanchero/Drume Negrita/El Manisero [Súper-Son]



The Big Geez is a retiree who takes time off from trimming ear hair to write about music -- sometimes doing conventional reviews, but often just sharing his opinions about how something resonates with his memories and those of his generation. You can read more of his faux pearls of wisdom at the [Geezer Music Club](#).

Comments

#1 — July 5, 2007 @ 21:42PM — Michael J. West [\[URL\]](#)

Geez, reading this review made something very rare happen: my mouth actually, physically watered at the prospect of hearing the disc. I can't heap higher praise on a music review than that. ;-)

#2 — July 6, 2007 @ 00:53AM — Big Geez [\[URL\]](#)

Thanks, Michael - not to get all gushy, but coming from someone I admire makes it extra special.

I can't say that it made my mouth water, but I felt like I was in one of those old movies -- maybe Weekend In Havana, with Cesar Romero and Carmen Miranda. Waaaay before your time, but you get my drift.

