

it to their eager listeners with spicy precision. Reggae, merengue, hip-hop, cumbia, bachata and the occasional ballad mesh perfectly on the group's 11th album (released in late 2006, but still worth revisiting), with tracks like "Me Tienes" highlighting exactly what it means to create "new traditional sounds"—a concept further explored on "OOH Ay," "La Monta Buena," and the teenage heartbreak anthem "Matame."

—JILL ETINGER



NIÑO JOSELE

Paz

Norte

Spanish producer Fernando Trueba's passion for jazz has fostered some of the freshest sounds heard today, and flamenco guitarist Niño Josele's exploration of the Bill Evans songbook is perhaps the most idiosyncratic undertaking yet. Josele's work with the extraordinary flamenco singer Diego "El Cigala" and Cuban piano legend Bebo Valdés inspired this project, which stems from Valdés' rendering of the signature Evans tune "Waltz For Debby." Josele's interpretations savor the contemplative beauty of the pianist's inimitable style, while creating inventive new voicings worthy of the originator. *Paz* (named for "Peace Piece," the Evans standard and album-opening guitar solo) is understated throughout, allowing the guitarist free range across the composer's songbook, with spare backing by saxophonist Joe Lovano, bassist Javier Colina (a native of Spain and one of Europe's foremost musicians), trumpeters Jerry González and Tom Harrell (who played with Evans), and singers Estrella Morente and Freddy Cole. The sublime result is a new jazz classic.

—MICHAEL STONE



ROBERT MIRABAL

In The Blood

Star Road Records

A Pueblo recording artist from New Mexico known not only for building and playing flutes but also for the depth and range of his songwriting, Robert Mirabal is one of Native America's biggest recording artists. *In The Blood* features songs—several of which are new versions of previously released Mirabal work, such as "Medicine Man" and "The Dance"—that juxtapose Native American life with American culture and experience. Mirabal's vocal style is smooth and warm, while his lyrics are vivid and profound, at times reminiscent of some of Robbie Robertson's early solo work. He sings in both English and his mother tongue of Tiwa, and stylistically his music ranges from ballads to full-on rock, with songs in between that draw heavily from his traditional Pueblo roots. Mirabal's versatility and talent have earned him numerous awards, including two Native American Artist of the Year awards, three Songwriter of the Year awards, and a Grammy in 2006 for Best Native American Album of the Year (for *Sacred Ground*). Produced by Andy Byrd and featuring veteran session guitarist Larry Mitchell, *In The Blood* promises to garner similar accolades.

—PAULA E. KIRMAN



ORISHAS

Antidiotico

Universal Latino

This compilation, which includes some hits, some newly recorded material and some previously unreleased material, offers a well-

rounded taste of this well-regarded Latin fusion band. Known for expertly and carefully mixing traditional Cuban influences with sounds culled from hip-hop and other genres, Orishas emerge with a music that is both unique and familiar at the same time. One definite highlight is "Represent Cuba," which features English and Spanish vocals by R&B singer Heather Headley, who sounds perfectly comfortable within a Latin setting. Also worth hearing are "Hay Un Son" ("There Is A Sound") and "Naci Orishas," which both successfully showcase the sonic mix that the group cultivates so well. While cuts like "El Kilo" and "Quien Te Dijo," featuring Miami MC Pitbull, essentially amount to filler, they don't mar the brilliance of this disc, which can be thoroughly enjoyed despite its weak moments.

—ERNEST BARTELDES



PAVADITA TANGO STRING QUARTET

Con Cuerda

Stemra

From the very first measures of their latest album, this talented all-female Danish string quartet plays with dexterity and panache, ably performing tangos that were especially composed for string quartet, as well as their own special arrangements. Availing themselves of an evocative repertoire, the two violinists (Sophie de Rijk and Ananta Roosens), violist (Laura Valenzuela) and cellist (Eva van de Poll) easily navigate some challenging passages, most of which clock in like stylistically diverse pop tunes, with nothing over five minutes long. "Nocturna" is immediately impressive, with its bouncy melody further highlighted by the ensemble's ability to conjure all sorts of sounds from their string-family instruments, including modern percussive sounds. "Caseron de Tejas," meanwhile, is reminiscent of a waltz, but in a darker-sounding, minor key. Vocalist Maria Jose Ortiz

appears on two tracks, adding even more flavor to this delicious musical mélange.

—ROBERT KAYE



OMARA PORTUONDO

Duets

Malanga Music

Unlike most of her compatriots in the Buena Vista Social Club, Omara Portuondo had a long and successful career, with a history of fruitful collaborations, before the project took off—all of which offers some insight into why her contributions were so magical. Her singing career actually began back in the '50s, in a group called Cuarteto D'Aida, with her sister Haydee and singers Elena Burke and Moraima Secada. The *Duets* here, culled from Cuba's Egreem label, come largely from the '80s and '90s. Several feature her teamed up again with Burke, along with Buena Vista's Pio Leyva and many others, as well as several backing ensembles that feature players like Rubén González, Juan Pablo Torres and Orlando "Cachaito" López. Buena Vista fans may find it a bit tiresome to wade through the light-as-air synth and string arrangements here, but regardless of the setting, partner or era, Portuondo's voice shines through. For anyone interested in Cuban music or the career of one of its most acclaimed singers, *Duets* is essential listening.

—CHRIS HEIM



R.K.M AND KEN-Y

Masterpiece:

Commemorative Edition

Universal Latino

José Nieves and Kenny Vázquez, aka R.K.M. (Rakim) and Ken-Y, follow the familiar reggaeton fast-