NOVEMBER 2009 ISSUE

FROM THE EDITOR

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This issue of Latin Beat Magazine Volume 19, Number 9, November 2009, is our annual "Special Percussion/Drum Issue", which celebrates "National Drum Month" throughout North America. Our featured artist this month is Puerto Rican percussionist/bandleader Richie Flores. In addition, also featured are Poncho Sanchez (who's enjoying the release of his latest production Psychedelic Blues), and trumpeter/bandleader Mario Ortiz Jr. (who has one of the hottest salsa
productions of the year). And as always, lots of music and entertainment news, reviews, hit parades and music information for your enjoyment. *Rudy Mangual*

★★★★

**RICHIE FLORES: DRUMMING TO MY BEAT**

By Rudy Mangual

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Latin Beat Magazine had the opportunity to speak one-on-one with one of the world's top Latin percussionists, Richie Flores, who is currently enjoying the release of his debut CD production as a leader. Described as a "drumming child prodigy" by his eighth birthday, Flores has been able to live up to the expectations of his fans and peers.

Rudy Mangual: Richie, where do you call home?
Richie Flores: Puerto Rico, even though I was born in Brooklyn, New York. By the time that I was a year old, my family had relocated to Puerto Rico. We first lived in the city of Guaynabo, later on moving to the city of Trujillo Alto. I was raised in Borinquen (Puerto Rico) until my 17th birthday.

RM: At what age did you reveal an interest in playing drums?
RF: By the age of four, I was already playing the conga drums. My father, Saúl Flores, was my first teacher and mentor. He was a local percussionist who enjoyed playing, but music was more like a hobby for him. He was what we call a rumbero (a street-jam percussionist) from Hemercio Canales (a low-income, tough housing project), which was the home of legendary rumberos, such as Celso Clemente, Frankie Rodriguez, and Papo Clemente. Initially, he was trying to teach my older brother to play when I was around three years old. My brother was not into it at all, but I was all over the drums. I would tell my dad, "Let me play, teach me dad, teach me", and he would say, "You are still too young, go away." But I wouldn't take "no" for an answer, and eventually one day he told me "OK, sit down and play." I have not stopped playing the conga, bongó, timbal or anything that I can bang on ever since. Within a couple of years, my father was taking me to parties, clubs and fiestas patronales (Puerto Rico's patron-saint celebrations) to sit in and play with some of the island's best salsa bands and folkloric players.
RM: What styles of conga drumming were you playing at such early age?
RF: Mostly salsa and Afro-Cuban rhythms and styles like guaguancó, chachachá, and son montuno. I first started playing on one drum, learning the basic patterns and hand strokes. Then, once I learned with two drums, I could accompany boleros and guarachas, followed by playing with three, four and even five drums at once. I remember as a kid, around age six, there was an event at school that required the playing of plena rhythms, and I didn't know the patterns. I ran home before the scheduled activity and told my dad, "You have to teach me how to play plena," and within an hour, I got the swing of it. I ran back to school and played plena at the event. After that day, my father introduced me to all our (Puerto Rican) folkloric rhythms—from bomba and plena to jíbaro music. Soon thereafter, I was sitting in with many of Puerto Rico's top musical exponents, including Rafael Cortijo and Sonora Ponceña. At home, I was listening to the music of Ray Barretto, the Joe Cuba Sextet, Eddie Palmieri, Cachao, Tata Güines, and Mongo Santamaría. I was learning by imitating these amazing players, under the guidance of my father.
RM: When did you initially play with the group Batacumbele?
RF: I was eight years old when Cachete Maldonado asked me to sit in with the band, playing next to Giovanni Hidalgo, Anthony Carrillo and Cachete himself. These guys were (and still are) the top players on the island, and Batacumbele is the ultimate progressive ensemble of its time. It was an extraordinary experience for me. That day, Cachete introduced me as "the drumming child prodigy", a title that inspired me to continue growing as a percussionist in the years to come.
RM: How did life change for you after the Batacumbele performance?
RF: It was the beginning of a series of events for me around the island, where I was invited by many renowned artists and bands as a special guest. One day, the bandleader/percussionist Roberto Roena caught my act, and asked me to join his band, Apollo Sound. I had just turned 13 years old. Of course, my father was there with me at every gig and concert. It was a rush playing with Roberto Roena and his Apollo Sound as a teen, jamming on the conga drums to mega-hit songs like *Marejada Feliz* and *El Escapulario*. 
RM: How do you see the state of Latin percussionists today in Puerto Rico?
RF: I think it's good. For quite sometime, percussionists from Puerto Rico have been evolving at a steady and progressive pace. Highly influenced by our Cuban brothers and their rhythms, as well as by the entire Latin American musical community, we are like sponges, absorbing everything we hear and encounter, while always adding to it our own "boricua" (Puerto Rican) flavor and taste. The New York salsa style and sound are other factors that add further dimension to the depths and talents of most Puerto Rican percussionists, along with the exposure to all the rhythms and forms of North American music.

RM: Tell us about your experiences with Eddie Palmieri.
RF: I was in my fourth year of playing congas with Roberto Roena's band, alongside Tito de Gracia on the timbal and Roena himself on the bongó. Eddie Palmieri had just released his album Palo Pa' Rumba with Eladio Pérez on congas, Giovanni Hidalgo on bongó, and Charlie Cotto on timbal; but Giovanni was getting very popular, performing with many bands at that time. Palmieri was scheduled to play at a special event called "The Latin Pianos" in New York City, which also featured Michel Camilo, Amuni Nacer and Eric Figueroa, and Giovanni couldn't make the gig. So Palmieri invited me to do the gig, along with another young Puerto Rican, a saxophone player named David Sánchez. After the concert, he asked both of us to join his band, and we accepted his offer and stayed in New York City.

RM: How old were you at this time?
RF: I was 18 years old when I started to tour around the world with Eddie Palmieri's band. I was a young man, finally on my own and ready to make a name for myself in the international music scene. Performing with Palmieri was an incredible learning experience in both the salsa and Latin jazz music scenes. It gave me the opportunity to meet many outstanding musicians and make some lifetime friendships. I stayed with Palmieri's band for almost eleven years.
RM: Did you establish yourself as a solo artist after your departure from Palmieri's band?
RF: I guess so, but in reality, toward my final years with Palmieri, I was performing as a guest musician with many other bands and was also featured in the studio for various recordings. I was also working on the material of my debut CD as a leader and planning to establish my own band. I continued to work with Palmieri as time permitted, as well as with Dave Valentín, Robby Ameen and Elio Villafranca, among many others.

RM: What's the title of your debut recording as a leader?
RF: It's simply titled *Richie Flores*. It was produced by my good friend, the master drummer Horacio "El Negro" Hernández, who also shares the trap-drum duties on the recording with my other amazing friend Robby Ameen. El Negro is the one who suggested the title for the CD, since it was my first production. Pianist Elio Villafranca helped me put the whole thing together with his arrangements and brilliant talent. Rounding out the band are John Benitez on bass (and even playing electric guitar on the opening track *Amigos*), Iván Renta (tenor sax), and Mike Rodríguez...
(trumpet). Guest musicians in the recording include Dave Valentin (flute), Hermán Olivera (vocals on Elena), Marfil Delgado (vocals on Latin Lover), Willie Torres (background vocals), and my dad Saul Flores (whose quinto playing can be heard on La Plena Plenita, which we co-wrote together). My father remained with us throughout all the sessions of this recording, but unfortunately, he is no longer alive to enjoy its release. Nine out of the eleven scores in the recording are my own compositions, plus one credited to Marfil Delgado (Latin Lover) and our cover of the Stevie Wonder classic Overjoyed (co-arranged by Villafranca and I).

RM: Do you play all the percussion tracks in this recording?
RF: Yes I did. I played the congas, timbal and bongó in all of them. El Negro played traps on seven tracks and Ameen played on three tracks.

RM: Prior to the release of your debut CD, as a bandleader, you kept yourself very busy by recording with many of Latin jazz and salsa greats of the East Coast. Tell us about it.
RF: Yes, I thank God for my blessings. I have been working with Sergio George on many of his salsa projects, including DLG, Ray de la Paz, and Johnny Rivera. I was featured on Celia Cruz's Grammy-winning production La Negra Tiene Tumbao, as well as on Tito Puente's last sessions. More recently, I have recorded with Dave Valentín, Robby Ameen, and Elio Villafranca. My record release party was held at La Fonda Boricua in El Barrio (Spanish Harlem), on September 17th and 18th of this year. By the beginning of October, I went to the Dominican Republic to perform with reggaeton superstar Don Omar, before an audience of over 40,000 fans. On October 24th, I returned to Puerto Rico for a Batacumbele Reunion Concert conducted at the Roberto Angulo Coliseum in the town of Carolina. Many of the original members of the band, including Cachete Maldonado (who is recovering from a stroke), came together for a memorable
night of high-octave Afro-Caribbean music.

RM: Tell us about your gear as a Pearl Drums endorsee.
RF: Yes, I came aboard with Horacio "El Negro" Hernández when Pearl Drums created their Pearl Percussion section. Soon thereafter, they gave me my first signature line of conga drums: Richie Flores Symbols Series, a set of four green conga drums (11" super-quinto, 11.5" quinto, 12" conga, and 12.5" tumbadora) covered with indigenous Taino symbols. In 2007, they released my second signature line of conga drums called "Richie Flores Lunar Eclipse". This set of three conga drums was designed according to my own specifications and with a multi-colored finish that allows you to change the look of the drums in seconds by simply turning the drums. It's very cool!
RM: How many conga drums do you normally play with?
RF: When playing salsa, two or three drums; but when playing Latin jazz, I utilize five to six drums (especially while performing with my own band). Multi-drums allow for the creation of more melodic sounds and the combination of such sounds, while visually adding another dimension to any performance. As for the tuning of my drums, I follow the tuning techniques of the great master conga player Patato Valdés. Patato tried to tune the drums as close as possible to the root major chords of the composition to be played, creating a particular tuning style and guide, which master conguero Giovanni Hidalgo has further perfected since the demise of Patato.

Mario Ortiz: Tribute to a Legacy
By Nelson Rodríguez
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Making significant contributions to the music world and reaching ultimate success are some of the objectives that do not come easily to today's salsa artists, but the legacy is something that usually gets recognized when you look at any given career in its entirety. Recently, I received a recording conducted as a tribute to a musician who must be regarded as one of the best Latin arrangers, bandleaders and top-notch instrumentalists of all time. In fact, he would have already celebrated the 45th year of his recording career as a bandleader if he were still alive. This year marks the 10th anniversary of the demise of one of Puerto Rico's top producers-Mario Ortiz Sr.-who set the world on fire in 1964 with the big band sounds of his Mario Ortiz All-Star Band.

It's not everyday that I get to write about one of my favorite artists, Mario Ortiz Sr., who was born in Santa Isabel in 1935. By the age of 13, he was already playing the trumpet, when he joined Ponce's Melody Boys Orchestra, before working with Mingo and his Whoopee Kids (a popular band of that era). He then returned to Santa Isabel to play for the next 13 years with the Caribbean Kids, a band led by his music teacher, Demetrio Rodríguez. That group also featured Luigi Texidor (on bongó) and vocalist Ruth Fernández.

On November of 1962, Mario Ortiz Sr. formed his own band, which included another legend who was 17 at the time...Elias Lopes. The band was baptized as the Mario Ortiz All-Star Band and that's precisely what it became. The band's constant
touring throughout the island led to the title of its first LP for the Rico-Vox label-On The Road (1963) featuring vocalists Emma Roger and Paquito Alvarez; trumpeters Elias Lopes, Salvador Jiménez and Yuyo Martínez; saxophonists Pedro Rivera Toledo (tenor), Manuel Montalvo (alto) and César Delgado (baritone); percussionists Celso Clemente, Pablo "Papi La Moña" Bonilla and Luis Sandoval; pianist Francisco Ortiz (who alternated with Mario Roman); drummer Federico Vigo and bassist Victor Rivera. Baritone sax player Julio César Delgado would go on to lead a great life as a producer in the heyday of TH throughout the 1980s, when I was working out of their New York office (He was a true gentleman and a very seasoned veteran who was the real secret behind the "salsa sensual" scene in Puerto Rico. It was around that time when I first met Mario Ortiz Jr). This LP would also be released as Holiday in San Juan, to be employed as a "tourist record guide"-included in the gatefold discount coupons and a 12x12 booklet with the best places and hotspots to go in 1964, along with ads and island tidbits-which is one of my favorite collector’s items today!

The hits from this debut were the jazzy Mambo Infierno, Maina, De Cachete and La Bicicleta (that had already become very popular on Fidel Cabrera’s radio show "Gran Show del Mediodía," transmitting from WIAC). Mario was a huge fan of the big bands-in particular México’s version of the Glen Miller Big Band, the Luis Arcaçaz Orchestra-and for that reason, he chose to utilize the three trumpet/three sax big band format for his own orchestra. With the success of that first recording, Mario Ortiz traveled to New York to play at the famed Palladium Ballroom in 1963, leading him the first authentic Puerto Rican band to play there.

They were signed by Remo Records, which led to three great recordings, starting with the LP Swinging With Mario Ortiz All Star Band, released in 1964. The band swung with the best from New York and the LP generated the hits Chinita, Yaré Yaré, Busca Ambiente, Para Los Bravos and the signature instrumentals, known back then as mambo-jazz, such as Cool Heat and Carioca. The band members were the same (with the exception of Elías Lopes) joined by Jacinto Picar and Paquito Jouvert (trumpets), Jesús "Chupín" Navarro (piano) and Willie Torres, Cheo Feliciano, Jimmy Sabater, Julio Cruz and Emma Rogers (vocals).
It was quickly followed by The Best of Mario Ortiz All-Star Band, with the addition of vocalist Chico Rivera (former vocalist of Lito Peña's Orquesta Panamericana). This second album featured the hits Rumberito, El Soplo, Cohete, Jala Jala No.2, Se Acabó el Bembé and the instrumentals Move and Malagueña. Other notable artists signed by the Remo label were Louie Ramírez (making his recording debut) and the popular Pete Rodríguez y La Magnífica. In 1965, Ortiz released Los Cabezones, and it is from these three LPs that the new Tributo-45 Aniversario draws its selection of hits. Los Cabezones was recorded at the same time as The Best... for the New York market, while The Best... was released in Puerto Rico and included the hits A Quitarse and El Cid. A Quitarse was also recorded on the Puerto Rico All-Stars' 1977 sophomore album Los Profesionales, with the vocals of Tito Allen and a piano solo by Mario Román (who played with Ortiz in the early days).

During all of these time-periods, Mario Ortiz Sr. had also become a musician on many television programs, including "El Show Libby's" (playing lead trumpet for Pepito Torres' band) and with his own band on "Show del Mediodía." Television exposure was huge for Ortiz, who performed as a sideman in the housebands of the television shows conducted by Myrta Silva and Chucho Avellanet, among many others; as well as on the radio airwaves, the primary medium in the 1950s and 1960s.

After working for only two and a half years with the aforesaid band, Mario became the featured bandleader at the San Geronimo Hotel for the following seven years, before joining Miguelito Miranda's orchestra at the Caribe Hilton. Along with Moncho Usera (with whom Mario was also a sideman at the hotels), Miguelito Miranda was considered to be one of the finest bandleaders in Puerto Rico during that era. It was steady work at a very important time in history, as the hotels provided good dance music and great back-up for their international shows, featuring Sammy Davis Jr., The Supremes, Tom Jones, and many others.

Ortiz performed on and off as a sideman at the hotels for 20 years. When Miranda retired in 1977, Ortiz took over as leader of the Caribe Hilton's houseband. Keep in mind that the Caribe Hilton was one of the most popular and prestigious hotels on the island. The international names that passed through the Caribe Hilton stage included Julio Iglesias, Vic Damone, The Stylistics, Robert Goulet and Diane Carroll. Originally contracted to play at the Gerónimo by Armando Castro, Ortiz also played with César Concepción and Vitín Miranda.

Back in 1988, I spoke with Mario in New York about his career during one of his performances at the Palladium on 14th Street (which had nothing to do with the original Palladium ballroom that was shut down in 1966). He recalled one of his most memorable periods in 1966, when Tito Rodríguez was living in Puerto Rico, and he chose the Mario Ortiz Band to travel with him and conduct a big show in a Venezuelan tour that also included Little Ray Romero, Chico Rivera and
Juancito Torres. That same year, Mario hooked up with Dario González's Borinquen label to back up popular vocalists Tito Lara on his LP Quisiera and to participate on Lissette Alvarez's debut. Lissette is known by many as Willy Chirino's wife, but she also had an illustrious career of her own throughout the 1970s.

After the hotel days, Ortiz met with Rafael Ithier—who had his own EGC label—and Ithier offered Mario the opportunity in 1975 to record his band (with Willie Rosario functioning as producer). The result was *Vivito y Coleando* (EGC 009). Mario Ortiz Jr. recalls that this LP served as an introduction to the studio recording that made him fall in love with salsa. My favorite track has always been *Random Riff*, featuring the soloists Rey Coen and Celso Clemente.

In 1976, Mario Ortiz Sr. became a member of Frankie Gregory's answer to the Fania all-Stars: The Puerto Rico All-Stars. Mario shined on Miles Davis' as soloist and arranger, and a year later, he would co-produce their second LP, Los Professionals, with arrangements by the great Jorge Millet. Both recordings featured Ortiz's longtime friend Elías Lopes as lead trumpeter and culminated with their November 1978 performance at Madison Square Garden in New York, where the band proved they could give their New York City counterparts a run for their money!

1977's *Borinquen Flame* allowed a 15-year old Gilberto Santa Rosa to make his recording debut, but the band never did perform live with Santa Rosa due to Ortiz's newly acquired status at the Caribe Hilton, where he replaced Miguelito Miranda. It was Mario Ortiz Jr. had met Gilberto in 1974 at the Escuela Libre de Música, and he was the one who recommended the young singer to his father for that particular recording. This recording had a line-up of musicians which included Polito Huertas, Elías Lopes, Eladio Pérez, René Hernández, Tony Sánchez Jr., Tommy Villanueva, Aldo Torres, Rafael Torres and former pianist Jesús Navarro (who also doubled on trombone), plus vocalists Santos Colón, Paquito Guzmán and Elliot Romero. Santa Rosa went on to record with Orquesta La Grande. Months later, during a performance at the Caribe Hilton (when the band was on strike, and he was performing a benefit for the musicians), Santa Rosa filled in for an absent Simón Pérez that night in the Tommy Olivencia Orchestra, and the rest is history!

That same year, Mario Ortiz Sr. was hired by Borinquen to produce holiday albums for Ramito (*Ramito en Salsa*) and La Calandria (*La Calandria en Salsa*), following the success of his second recording for Borinquen titled *Bailables Navideños*, in which he displayed his passion for Christmas music.
From 1977 to 1983, Mario Ortiz Jr. performed with his dad's band as fourth trumpet at the Caribe Hilton. In 1984, Ortiz Jr. became a regular in the band upon its signing with the label Combo, and he was featured on the 1984 release *Vamos a Gozar*, during the early stages of the "salsa sensual" era. Compositions on this recording were penned by Gilberto Santa Rosa (who had two songs picked out for himself - *Vamos* and *El Pescador*) and Roberto Anglero (one of Mario's oldest friends); and the album featured Luis Quevedo (piano), Gole Fernández and Charlie Sierra (timbal), Ramón Irizarry (bass), Tommy Villariny, Gilberto Santa Rosa, Tony Vega and Chico Rivera (vocal chorus), and the uncredited Sammy Vélez (baritone sax). It also introduced two young voices - 19 year-old Anthony Cruz (who was recommended by his brother Nelson Cruz), and 29 year-old Primi Cruz, who had auditioned by phone after being recommended by Rafael Ithier.

The Johnny Ortiz composition *Cuidadito* became the band's first hit in Puerto Rico, and the hits just kept on coming with *Los Soneros* and *Arrollando el Sabor*. In 1985, *Ritmo y Sabor* generated the hit *Negra Quiéreme* and *De Ninguna Manera*, followed by the 1986 LP *Déjenme Soñar* (with the hits *Déjenme Soñar* and *Tu Forma de Querer*) and 1987's *Algo Diferente*, released at the height of the "salsa romántica" scene (with the huge hits *En Bancarrota* and *Háblame En La Cama*) and 1988's *Sexy Salsa*, featuring Luigi Valentín (as replacement for Primi Cruz, who went on to sing for Willie Rosario), and introducing the hits *A Fuego Lento* and *Pensar En Ti*, which placed the band at the top of many playlists worldwide. Anthony Cruz's name became known worldwide through his performance of these two spectacular hits in 1987. Although Mario Ortiz Sr. was not a big fan of this "salsa sensual" movement, he certainly thrived during that time span at the end of the 1980s. Gilberto Santa Rosa was once again instrumental during these recordings as a coach to Primi and Anthony's soneos.

When Gilberto Santa Rosa went solo, Mario Ortiz Sr. was there as his co-producer with Rafael Ithier on the debut *Good Vibrations*, during which Mario Jr. served as a studio musician. This collaboration repeated itself for his next two recordings on Combo. Mario Sr. also produced and arranged for Moncho Santana (ex-Grupo Niche star best known for being the voice of Cali Pachangero) and later Cano Estremera in 1994 and 1996. After disbanding the group in 1991 Mario went on to arrange for many salsa acts and toured with Gilberto Santa Rosa and Jerry Rivera.

Meanwhile, Mario Jr. became an intricate part of the "mini big band" sound that Mario Sr. always loved (despite not being able to record Latin jazz during his Combo days). The younger Ortiz has maintained a pretty good career, and today leads the tribute to his father that is worthy of a Grammy award. Born on March 5, 1961, Mario Jr. acquired his musical education at San Juan's
Escuela Libre de Música, where he had the opportunity to meet longtime friends like Gilberto Santa Rosa, baritone saxophonist Ernesto Sánchez (who occupied the sax chair in the band in 1986, and became one of the most requested salsa sensual arrangers of the 1980s), David "Piro" Rodríguez, and Humberto Ramírez. He started to play with Máximo Torres' Chiquitines del Son and Don Perignón's Evolución 75 at age 15, and at 16, with vocalist Tito Allen. With Allen he experienced the talents of José Gazmey, Piro Rodríguez, Jimmy Morales, Andy Guzmán, and Jochy Rodríguez.

While continuing his schooling in Michigan, Puerto Rico and Florida, Ortiz Jr. recorded four LPs with the Willie Rosario Orchestra (TH Records), starting with 1980's *El de a 20 de Willie, Atízame el Fogón* (1982), *The Salsa Machine* (1983), and *Nuevos Horizontes* (1984). Mario Jr. was also given the opportunity to co-produce *Nuevos Horizontes* (probably the most famous of all of Rosario's recordings), which featured the vocals of Gilberto Santa Rosa and Tony Vega. The hits included the Adalberto Alvarez classic *Lluvia, Sí Yo Tuviera Un Millón*, Carmelito del Campo (with a trumpet solo by Mario Ortiz Sr., a frequent guest on Rosario recordings), *Babarabatiri, Changó Ta Bení*, and the instrumental *Laura*. Rosario always reserved the right to record Latin jazz as did Bobby Valentín and was a staple of the old-school Puerto Rican bands. Mario Jr. joined his father and recommended to Rosario that his seat be filled by Humberto Ramírez, who was in San Francisco at the time.

By this time, Mario Ortiz Sr. had reorganized his band with the two new singers, later joined by a third vocalist, Nelson Rodríguez. Meanwhile Mario Jr. had connected with Julio César Delgado at TH and became a top studio musician, which was the established norm in the field of "salsa romántica", He recorded for Lalo Rodríguez, Andy Montañez, Tommy Olivencia, Frankie Ruiz, Paquito Guzmán, and many others. In 1990, he obtained a Bachelor's Degree in Music Education from the University of Miami, and went on tour with Juan Luis Guerra & 4.40 for several years. In 1993, he went back to the University of Miami to complete his Master's Degree and had the fortunate opportunity to play with Dizzy Gillespie, Arturo Sandoval, Gerry Mulligan, Joe Henderson and other jazz greats. Today, he is a music teacher in Miami-Dade County and has worked during the past few years in preparing the recording *Tributo-45 Aniversario*, fronting the Mario Ortiz All-Star Band (featuring Gilberto Santa Rosa, Cheo Feliciano, Richie Ray, Andy Montañez, Tito Allen, Papo Lucca, Elias Lopes, Bobby Valentín, Adalberto Santiago, Ismael Miranda, Bobby Cruz, Prim Cruz, Anthony Cruz, Ismael Rivera Jr., Tony Vega, Pedro Brull, Roberto Roena, Chico Rivera, Celso Clemente Jr., and more).

Mario Ortiz Jr. is very proud of this amazing project that includes 16 tracks from his father's debut LP and the Remo sessions. More amazing is that these musicians did without any financial compensation. They all wanted to be a part of history! Using his father's arrangements, with a few changes and the help of his friend Ernesto Sánchez, Mario chose *Maina* (with the voice of Anthony Cruz), *Mambo Infierno* (with the assistance of Lenny Prieto on the transcription, Adalberto Santiago on vocals and a reggaetón mix) and the Machito classic ¡*Qué Bonito Es*
**Puerto Rico!** (with Primi Cruz and with Mario's niece, Adriana, singing Graciela's part) from the debut album *On the Road*.

On *Swinging with Mario Ortiz*, he chose Tony Vega to sing *Yaré Yaré*, with an awesome piano solo by Papo Lucca. The big PR hit *Chinita* features vocals by Gilberto Santa Rosa and *Para Los Bravos* features vocalist Andy Montañez, Cheo Feliciano, Gilberto Santa Rosa, Adalberto Santiago, Bobby Cruz, Tito Allen, Pedro Brull, Ismael Miranda, Anthony Cruz and Ismael Rivera Jr. paying tribute to all those bravos (brave ones) that have passed away.

Con Güiro y Pandereta (designed to be a holiday favorite this year, as it was in 1964-65) is now sung by Pedro Brull. There were two versions of this parranda, the first with vocals by Paquito Álvarez and the second one sung in 1967 by Chico Rivera, who can be heard on the new version, joking around with Roberto Anglero. The track Malagueña now features Richie Ray and Luis Aquino as soloists, and it was extracted from the LP The Best of Mario Ortiz All-Star Band. Bobby Cruz sings on Rumberito, with a great bongó solo by Roberto Roena. El Soplo, with vocals by Tito Allen, is a bit faster here and includes elder statesmen from 43 years ago-Pedro Rivera Toledo, Ulises Ortiz (Mario Sr's brother, who also played with Ortiz), Rafael "El Indio" Martínez (saxes) and Gole Fernández (timbal). Se Acabó el Bembé features Ismael Miranda, and the Miles Davis hit "Move" now highlights a timbal solo by Rigoberto Díaz, originally delivered by Gole Fernández in 1964. Chico Rivera handles the Bolero Medley -Odiame and Anoche Hablé Con un Niño? and shows that he still has the vocal styling that once made him famous. Cheo Feliciano sings A Quitarse (from the LP Los Cabezones) and relates to Mario Ortiz being at the Palladium in 1963 to see the Mario Ortiz Band play and the pride he felt to see a Puerto Rican band performing like those from New York. El Cid is a fusion of the original by Mario Sr. on the solo with Mario Jr…. Ortiz Sr. must be smiling at his son from heaven with only one regret: that he was not here to be a part of it!

Mario Jr. provided me with a DVD disc that shows the making of this great recording, and I'd like to share some of the comments made by those who recorded on the CD….

**Elías Lopes:** "The first Remo recording we did was done right after doing a dance at the Palladium Ballroom. With the entire band, we did four numbers in 12 hours and 12 hours the next day to finish the other four numbers on two channels (one for the band and one for the vocals). For me it was a privilege to be with Mario at the time and he was an inspiration who taught me many things about the music."

**Bobby Valentín:** "The man could be having a conversation with you and at the same time hear everything that is being played...stop on a dime and point out the error by any musician...he was unique that way and similar to Juancito Torres, but at a higher level."

**Roberto Anglero:** "I was a car mechanic and Mario would come by and ask me if I had a tune for him. I told him I'd go to his house but he insisted on taking out a music sheet and writing the
song right there. He asked me to stop by his house on Thursday and listen to the finished product”.

**Bobby Cruz:** “Mario was one of the inspirations in my wanting to be a musician, along with the Titos (Puente & Rodriguez).”

★★★★★

**Poncho Sánchez CD Release at Amoeba Music**

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Legendary conguero Poncho Sánchez performed a mini-concert at Amoeba Music in Hollywood, October 11, 2009, in support of his latest CD Psychedelic Blues (Concord Records). An appreciative audience crowded the aisles near the stage to see Poncho Sánchez and his band (Joey De León, John Belzaguy, David Torres, George Ortiz, Francisco Torres, Ron Blake and Javier Vergara) perform material from his latest CD dedicated to the music of the late great percussionist Willie Bobo. The tune Con Sabor Latino was recorded in honor of Chico Sesma, a pioneering DJ and Los Angeles Latin jazz and salsa promoter.