

# The Americas & Caribbean

Valdés playing introspectively à la Bill Evans in a traditional jazz context: 'Pasadas las 12' features tenor saxophonist Jose Carlos Acosta; 'Balada Para Trompeta #1' has trumpeter Julio Padron; and 'Blues 1080' is a lovely duet with his old *compadre* from the Combo and later Irakere, guitarist Carlos Emilio Morales. There's just a slight suspicion that Tumi's impetus might perhaps have been more to advertise their wares than to create a coherent addition to the Valdés oeuvre. But the label has nevertheless assembled a pleasing compilation, with a nice bright sound quality.

Mark Sampson

## VARIOUS ARTISTS

### Bachata Roja: Acoustic Bachata from the Cabaret Era

iASO Records IASCO3

Full Price (44 mins)

★★★★

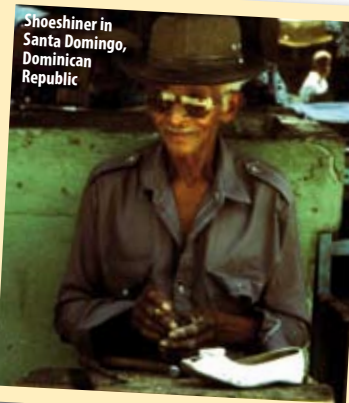
**The blistering bachata back-story**



Very much of a piece with the Puerto Plata album also reviewed in this issue [above], this set rides

Dominican *bachata* into the electric era, and echoes the 1970s migration of the rural bachata community into the capital, with the inevitable plugging-in of guitars. The songs flow from classic *bolero*-like bachatas to hits from the 70s to the 90s, but the dominance of Cuba's *son*-based styles has vanished: this is a proudly local style. Emotive lyrics remain crucial and the songs still rely on the expressiveness of the singers, but also upon the niftiness of guitarists who tinker with tones and techniques and even approach the brilliant repetitions of Congolese stylists in places.

Voices and guitars are the focus: with Rafael Encarnación's 'Muero Contigo' sung in a glorious 1930s-style high-croon



DEBORAH PACINI HERNANDEZ



BENJAMIN DUBREUIL

### Puerto Plata Mujer de Cabaret

iASO Records IASCO2

Full Price (39 mins)

★★★★

**Debut album of eightysomething songster**



This, the second release from the excellent new label iASO opens up an important golden era of Dominican music from the early 20th century, through specifically Dominican versions of the acoustic guitar song tradition popular throughout Latin America in the 1930s and 40s. The focus is on the two sensational guitarists (playing Dominican *requintos*, cousins to the *tres*) Edilio Paredes and Frank Mendez. Their breathtaking finger-picked solos, funky bachata riffs, and delicate harmonic colours match any world-famous performers as they back the 84-year singing legend Puerto Plata (aka José Cobles) on his debut solo album. Similarities with the Buena Vista story are inevitable – this is a long overdue spotlight on an ignored vocal genius. Cobles' expressive range, sureness of pitch, and the soul-stirring sweetness of his tone, particularly on the *bolero* 'Santiago' would suit any Motown album, and carries resonances of Cuba's Guillermo Portabales.

*Mujer de Cabaret* resurrects songs from the "brothel bars" frequented by rural peasant workers. The overwhelming presence of Cuban *son* and *boleros* dominates this gorgeous collection, but there are also local *merengues* and heart-tugging *bachatas* – the acoustic originals that remained obscure national treasures until Juan Luis Guerra's electrified versions burst on the world. The set closes with a comic, conversational *ranchera*, 'La Comelona'. A revelation.

Sue Steward

against José Manuel Calderon's rippling guitar work, while Felix Quintana's dramatic intonation of 'Ladrona' possesses a tango-like quality. Positioned chronologically, the songs grow increasingly urbanised and faster, and culminate in 'Asesina' by Juan Bautista, whose guitarist, El Tweeter, inspired many of today's bachata stars.

It sits effortlessly against Bautista's beautifully husky vocals. Among the legends of electric and acoustic guitar here are the versatile Augusto Santos and the ubiquitous finger-picking ace, Edilio Paredes. The emotional masterpiece 'Pena', by Luis Segura, paves the way for the legendary Blas Duran, whose twangy mid-80s hits were the soundtrack to life in the Dominican Republic while Juan Luis Guerra was composing the bachata hits that would transform Latin music forever. Another triumphant iASO project.

Sue Steward

TOP  
OF THE  
WORLD  
ALBUM



### The Essential Guide to Latin Jazz

Union Square Music ESGCD 320

Budget Price (3 CDs; 205 mins)

★★★★

**Latin vibes from across the globe**



'jazz singers.' But if you accept this as just a good excuse for some splendid, disparate Latin music, then Union Square has hit the mark again. Many of the names are familiar, but compiler Chris Ingham's choices are rarely obvious. The first CD ('The Players') kicks off proceedings, appropriately, with 'One Note Samba' from *Jazz Samba*, the Stan Getz/Charlie Byrd big seller that

sparked the whole 1960s *bossa nova* vogue. However, apart from the Dizzy Gillespie warhorse 'Manteca', and vibraphonist Cal Tjader's evergreen rendition of 'Afro-Blue', the other dozen cuts will probably be less familiar. Standouts are a trio of piano tracks: Charlie Palmieri's wacky take on the Fred Astaire dance number 'El Continental'; Hilton Ruiz's interpretation of trumpeter Lee Morgan's 'Mr Kenyatta'; and New York-based Hector Martignon's sizzling 'Colombaio'.

The bossa-centric second CD ('The Singers') features a couple of the more obscure Tom Jobim numbers (one with Elis Regina), and songs in a similar vein interpreted by the likes of Eliane Elias, Clare Teal, Stacey Kent, the Dutch diva Saskia, and (promisingly) John and Cleo's daughter, Jacqui Dankworth. Tania Maria scats up a storm on 'Yatra-Tá', a young Flora Purim exudes class on Chick Corea's 1978 'Open Your Eyes You Can Fly' and German-born Ingrid Laubrock puts down her customary saxophone to steal the show, singing an intimate duet with bass clarinet on 'Beatrice'.

If the third CD ('The Bands') throws Perez Prado's incongruous 'Mambo No 5' into the equation, it also serves up the bona fide likes of Mongo Santamaria, Poncho Sanchez, Machito, Mario Bauza and Eddie Palmieri. An early incarnation of Duke Ellington's 'Caravan' is juxtaposed boldly with Irakere's incendiary 'Homenaje a Beny', which just about steals the honours from Coco All Stars' excellent 'Macho'. With so much good music at such a modest price, this collection has got to be a great buy for enthusiasts both fresh and seasoned.

Mark Sampson

### This Is Cuba

Metro Triple METRTCD835

Budget Price (3 CDs; 187 mins)

★★★

**More of the same, but it's a good same to have more of**



A triple-CD set of 'Music for the feet, for the soul and for the heart' – miraculously the market for Cuban music continues growing as the legendary musicians of the Buena Vista Social Club reach new audiences long after many of its members have died. Immortality is guaranteed also via the continual re-licensings and reissues by EGREM, Cuba's state recording company, of its already ransacked back-catalogue.

DJs like John Armstrong have collated some of the better compilations, by >>