



Biography of Omar Sosa (pianist from Cuba)

Omar Sosa is one of the most versatile jazz artists on the scene today: composer, arranger, producer, pianist, percussionist, and bandleader. He fuses a wide range of world music and electronic elements from his native Afro-Cuban roots to create a fresh and original urban sound - all with a Latin jazz heart. On stage, Mr. Sosa is a charismatic figure, inspiring his fellow musicians with his dynamic playing and improvisational approach to the music - an approach full of raw emotional power and humor. Mr. Sosa invariably inspires audiences to their feet and to join him in chorus vocals, heightening the sense of spontaneity and connection.

Mr. Sosa's latest CD on Otá Records, "Mulatos", features Latin Jazz Master **Paquito D'Rivera** on Clarinet. The recording is an adventurous, finely wrought and wholly delightful mélange of Cuban Jazz, Latin Dance Grooves, French Chanson, North African Trance Music, and European Folk. It dances with rhythmic inspirations of Indian tabla, jazz drums, and studio mixing. Also featured is the delicate voice of the Arabic lute, the oud, and the composer himself on marimba. "Mulatos" was recently nominated for Latin Jazz Album of the Year by the NYC-Based Jazz Journalists Association.

Mr. Sosa's music is a unique style of Afro-Cuban Jazz, and while it is rooted in the folkloric traditions of the African Diaspora, he always takes an exploratory approach - never one to let orthodoxy stand in the way of his pursuit of freedom.



OMAR SOSA / photo courtesy of OTA Records

Sosa offers a joyful mix of Jazz and Afro-Caribbean Rhythms, combining percussive forays inside the piano and a series of electronic effects with his inspired, and passionate playing at the keyboard. His tempo are fluid, and his moods change freely, Sosa revels in the irresistible clave grooves of Latin Jazz, while adding experimental touches to keep his listeners on their toes. **Omar Sosa**, has released 15 recordings on the Oakland-based Otá Records Label since 1997, including 2002's GRAMMY-nominated "Sentir". He performed recently with his octet at the opening of

Carnegie Hall's new Zankel Hall, about which Alex Ross of the "New Yorker" remarked that Sosa has "a ferocious flair for rhythm and a keen musical wit. Composer John Adams, who curated the opening of Carnegie Hall's new venue, commented that "Sosa is a deeply creative musician with an extraordinary harmonic sense. His piano playing is *Sui Generis*: it has obvious roots in Cuban Music, but he's taken his approach to the keyboard into completely new regions", and Don Hechman of "the Los Angeles Times" recently wrote: "Sosa's vision of contemporary jazz reaches across every imaginable boundary".

Omar Sosa was nominated in 2003 for a BBC Radio 3 Award for World Music in "The Americas" category, along with **Ibrahim Ferrer**, **Caetano Veloso**, and **Os Tribalistas**. He began 2004 with the debut of his first work for Symphony Orchestra, entitled "From Our Mother", performed at The Paramount Theatre in Oakland by the Oakland East Bay Symphony under the direction of Michael

Morgan. The 45-minute work in three movements, which combines folkloric elements from Cuba, Venezuela, and Ecuador with modern jazz harmonies, was co-commissioned by Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco and The Oakland East Bay Symphony, with partial funding from The Rockefeller Foundation.

Composer and pianist Omar Sosa was born (April 10, 1965) and raised in Camagüey, Cuba, the largest island city of the island nation, with a current population of about 300,000. The city lies at the center of a large prairie, junction point of railroads and highways, commercial center for trade in cattle and sugar produced in the province, and home of many beautiful churches, cathedrals, and mansions. His father, Sindulfo Sosa, was a teacher of history and philosophy, as well as an administrator of the local school system. His mother Maricusa Palacios, now retired and living in Havana, was a telex operator for the local electric company. At the age of eight, Omar began studying percussion including marimba, at the music conservatory in Camagüey after passing a rigorous musical exam, Sosa moved his studies to the prestigious Escuela Nacional de música in Havana. Here as a teenager, not finding his first choice instrument -the marimba- readily available, he began to focus on the piano, finishing his formal education in 1983 at the Instituto Superior de Arte, also in Havana.

Growing up in Camagüey, Omar listened to music at home -**Nat King Cole, Orquesta Aragón, Pacho Alonso, Benny Moré**, and much classical music. He was impressed early on by one of his father's records -a set of Cuban Descargas -but had no idea that this was Latin Jazz. He was touched profoundly by the music's freedom and expressiveness. It was the group **Los Amigos** with **Frank Emilio Flynn, Tata Güines, Cachao, and Barreto**... Another album constantly on the Family's record player was called "Piano-Forte" a recording by **Chucho Valdés**. Omar was also impressed by a recording of Afro-Cuban songs by the **Conjunto Folklórico Nacional** -so much so that he briefly toyed with the idea of becoming a dancer.

Later, at the Conservatory in Havana, influenced by his classmates, Omar became familiar with the music called Jazz. He listened to a radio program hosted by the father of drummer **Horacio "El Negro" Hernández**. Students would stay up late to hear the show, and compare notes at the school the next day, at the time, this radio show was one of the main sources of information about jazz. Later, as some of his peer's musician parents began to travel, Omar received records and information about many of the great American artists like **Oscar Peterson, Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea, Keith Jarrett, Coltrane, Charlie Parker**. At the same time, Omar was influenced by progressive Cuban Artists like **Chucho Valdés, Irakere** and **Emiliano Salvador**. It was also as he finished his studies in 1983 that he was introduced to the music of Thelonius Monk, whose legacy of expressive freedom has left a strong mark on Omar's creative approach. By the late '80's, having studied everything from Afro-Cuban folkloric traditions to European Classical Music, he began working with two Cuban Pop Singers -first **Vicente Feliú**, then **Xiomara Laugart** -serving as a Musical Director for various of their touring and recording ensembles.

Moving to Quito, Ecuador for several years beginning in 1993, Sosa discovered the folkloric music of Esmeraldas, a pocket of African-rooted culture on the North-West Coast of that Country known specially for its use of the marimba. In addition to launching his own jazz fusion ensemble, "Entrenoz", Sosa produced "Andarele" a recording by the Afro-Ecuadorian **Group Koral y Esmeralda**.

After a brief stint in Palma Mallorca, Spain. Omar moved to the San Francisco Bay area in late 1995 where he quickly invigorated the local Latin Jazz Scene with his explosive playing and adventurous writing. The next year Sosa made his U.S recording debut on Otá Records with the "Solo Piano/Omar Omar", followed in 1997 with the first in a trilogy of groundbreaking large-ensemble,

world-jazz recordings: "Free Roots", "Spirit of the Roots" 1998 and "Bembon" 2000.

In 1998 Omar began his collaboration with noted Bay Area percussionist and Educator **John Santos**. The duo released a live recording "Nfumbe" in conjunction with their appearance at The San Francisco Jazz Festival that year. The following year, revealing more of the contemplative side of his musical sensibilities, Omar released his second solo piano recording "Inside" a top 20-selling CD in France for distributor Night & Day. Capping an extraordinarily productive period, Omar also traveled to Ecuador in 1999 to record his critically acclaimed CD "Bembon".

With "Prietos" 2001 and "Sentir" 2002, Omar stretches his genre-expanding fusion still further with the use of traditional vocals and instruments from the Gnawa culture of North Africa. With find tongues in Arabic, English, Portuguese, Spanish and Yoruba, as well as instruments like guembri, oud, djembe, balafon and marimba. These recordings are World Music in its truest sense: strong, uncompromising sounds, yet always welcoming and honest. Throughout we hear Omar's genius as an arranger and his extraordinary inspiration at the piano.

"Sentir" recently received both a Latin Grammy and Grammy nomination for Best Latin Jazz Album as well as the Award for Afro-Caribbean Jazz of the year from the Jazz Journalists Association in New York. Omar's current CD "Ayaguna", released in february 2003, is a live duo recording with Venezuelan percussionist **Gustavo Ovalles**. These two kindred spirits have been performing together since 1999, delighting audiences throughout Europe, Japan and the United States with their inspired musical chemistry and creativity. In september 2003, Omar release his third solo piano recording, "A New Life" dedicated to his son Lonious, said Sosa; born in July 2002. This heartfelt set of 16 improvisations was recorded at Hidden Barn Studio on the bluffs overlooking the Pacific Ocean in Big Sur, in California, and revolves around the themes of childbirth and infancy, reflecting Omar's experience as a new father. The mood is generally relaxed and contemplative, in contrast to the more percussive style of Omar's Ensemble playing, as usual, we find Omar playing occasionally inside the piano, and we find a version of his beautiful new ballad "iyawo", released first as the enhanced CD bonus track on "Ayaguna" (ota1010).

Also in September 2003, Omar Sosa received a lifetime achievement award from the Smithsonian Institution for his contributions to the development of Latin Music in the United States. The presentation coincided with Omar's Washington, DC debut. at the famed Voice of America Auditorium. Mr. Sosa began the year (2003) with the debut of his first work for Symphony Orchestra entitled: "From Our Mother", performed at the Paramount Theatre in Oakland, California, by the Oakland East Bay Symphony



OMAR SOSA / Photo by David Sproule

under the direction of **Michael Morgan**. The 45-minute work in three movements, which combines folkloric elements from Cuba, Venezuela, and Ecuador with modern jazz harmonies, was co-commissioned by Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco and the Oakland East Bay Symphony, with partial funding from the Rockefeller Foundation. Released in January 2004, "Pictures of Soul" (ota1012), is a duo collaboration with Los Angeles-based percussionist **Adam Rudolph**. These two creative musicians have enjoyed each other's work at a distance for several years. Both share an appreciation of ritual trance music -music that leads us into altered states of consciousness. In April of 2002, when Sosa and his septet arrived in Los Angeles for a run at the Jazz Bakery, it was possible for these kindred spirits to meet and make music together. The result is "Pictures of Soul", a poignant aural journey into the transcendent realms of the creative music process.

Sosa and Rudolph both experience their art as an interactive spiritual voyage. Their approach in the studio called simply for an openness to explore musical landscapes together -without charts, without rehearsal. In "Pictures of Soul" we find a wide range of expression, from delicate introspection to fiery dance. Sosa plays mostly acoustic piano, both on the keys and inside the instrument. Rudolph is featured on an array of hand drums, including djembe, tarija, dumbek and tabla. Sosa has released 10 recordings on the Otá Label since 1997, including 2002's Grammy-nominated "Sentir". He performed recently with his Octect at the opening of Carnegie Hall's new Zankel Hall, about which **Alex Ross** of the new remarked that Sosa has "a ferocious flair for rhythm and a keen musical wit". Composer **John Adams**, who curated the opening of Carnegie Hall's new venue, commented that "Sosa is a deeply creative musician with an extraordinary harmonic sense. His piano playing us suigeneris: It has obvious roots in Cuban Music, but he's taken his approach to the keyboard into completely new regions". And **Don Hecman** of the Los Angeles Times recently wrote "Sosa's vision of contemporary jazz reaches across every imaginable boundary". Fans of improvised music as well as aficionados of all types of intimate jazz settings will find "Pictures of Soul" a rewarding listen. Omar's next recording "Mulatos", is set for released in October 2004. Here Omar Sosa searches out new sound for a music that is simultaneously his own, and part of an Afro-Cuban culture. Mulatos is a fitting description for the kind of approach Omar is adopting -a mix of Cuban Music that dances with rhythmic inspirations of Indian tabla, Jazz drums and studio mixing. Listening to the voices of the Arabic lute, the oud, a fore runner of the Cuban tres, and the European clarinet melodies reminding him of Paquito D'Rivera and the repertoire of great Cuban Masters, Omar Sosa's unique way of imagining how this can fit together and making the leap to realize the recording of it, is what makes him stand out as a very modern musician -an inventive and courageous artist. The album "Mulatos" features the highly individual talents of **Dhafer Youssef**(oud), **Steve Argüelles**(drums, electronics), **Dieter Ilg**(double bass), **Phillippe Foch**(tabla), and **Renaud Pion**(clarinets). With the exception of Omar Sosa, the relation to Cuban Music for these musicians is somewhat removed, though respectful and engaging. Omar's extraordinary abilities as a composer, pianist, marimba percussionist (new here to many of his followers) and his authoritative leadership threads this together beautifully to create a major development for a Cuban Jazz artist. Joining the project as special guest on clarinet three compositions, someone whose artistry Omar has admired for many years, is **Paquito D'Rivera**. Co-producer Steve Argüelles remarks, "It's an album that is tightly constructed, like movie editing in the sense that the clarity of musical ideas are presented to maximum effect, be it a simple melody, a curious rhythm, an electronic touch here and there, or Omar's singing. It remains rich, too in the way that a favorite record is what you keep returning to, an important objective of ours. It tells a story about Omar's relation to Jazz, Afro-Cuban rhythms and spirituality, the piano, and a freely expressive mind".

The year(2004), Omar was nominated for a BBC Radio 3 award for World Music in the "Americas" category, along with **Caetano Veloso** and **Ibrahim Ferrer**. In the united states , Mr. Sosa invited renowned french Caribbean percussionist, **Mino Cinelu**, to join his Spring tour, including Omar's debut in Miami, Florida and a concert at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa,Canada. as a duo, Omar and Mino appeared on the Arts & Entertainment TV Network's "Breakfast with America" program in March. Other highlights of 2004 include Omar's first visit to the Essaouira Festival in Morocco(June), the filming of a documentary at The Porto Latino Festival in Corsica for broadcast on Mezzo and France 3 National TV, a guest appearance with Paris-based drummer and producer Doctor L at the Montreux Jazz Festival(July), and the web-site only released of Omar's fourth solo piano CD,"Aleatoric EFX" recorded live a Radio Bremen in Germany.

DISCOGRAFIA DE OMAR SOSA

TITLE	THEME	LABEL	YEAR
1. OMAR OMAR /Solo Piano	"Cha Cha Du Nord"	Sello Otá Records	1997
2. FREE ROOTS	"Mis tres notas"	Sello Otá Records	1997
3. NFUMBE	"Un congo en Sevilla"	Sello Otá Records	1998
4. SPIRIT OF THE ROOTS	"La tela pa'oya"	Sello Otá Records	1999
5. INSIDE	"Fué en París"	Sello Otá Records	1999
6. BEMBOM	"Marimchacha"	Sello Otá Records	2000
7. PRIETOS	"Why so complicated?"	Sello Otá Records	2001
8. SENTIR	"Cielo y mar Azules"	Sello Otá Records	2002
9. AYAGUNA	"Africa madre viva"	Sello Otá Records	2003
10.A NEW LIFE	"Danzón de los Indios"	Sello Otá Records	2003
11.PICTURES OF SOUL"	"Trace of burning stars"	Sello Otá Records	2004
12.ALEATORIC EFX	"Días de Iyawo"	Sello Otá Records	2004
13.MULATOS	"Nuevo Manto"	Sello Otá Records	2004
14.BALLADS	"Antes de ir va esto"	Sello Otá Records	2005
15.MULATOS REMIX	"Nuevo flow"	Sello Otá Records	2006
16.LIVE À FIP	"African sunrise"	Sello Otá Records	2006
17.PROMISE	"Eleggua en Do"	Sello Otá Records	2007
19.AFREECANOS	"Why Angá?"	Sello Otá Records	2007
20.D.O- A DAY OFF	"Flirtation"	Sello Otá Records	2007
21.TALES FROM THE HEART	"Sugar baby blues"	Sello Ota Records	2009
22.ACROSS THE DIVIDE	"Cha com Marimba"	Sello HN	2009
23.CEREMONY	"Dance of reflection"	Sello Ota Records	2010
24.CALMA	"Alma"	Sello Ota Records	2011
25.ALMA	" So All Freddie"	Sello Ota Records	2012
26.EGGUN		Sello Ota Records	2013

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