Putumayo Presents: Afro-Latin Party (2005)



1. Betece - Africando 2. Ritmo Con Ache - Jose Mangual Jr. 3. Cuentame Que Te Paso - Pepe & The Bottle Blondes 4. Babalu - Ska Cubano 5. Mandali - Africando 6. Morenita - Cubismo 7. Demal - Africando 8. Cogele El Gusto - Chico Alvarez 9. La Grev' Bare Mwen - Ronald Rubinel's Salsa Kolor 10. Samba Luku Samba - Ricardo Lemvo

Croatian salsa, Cuban ska, and Oregonian mambo!?!? These are three of the unlikely gems listeners will find on Afro-Latin Party. What started out as an effort to provide the perfect soundtrack to a Latin dance party became a tribute to the global appreciation and realization of the musical ricochet between Cuba and Africa.

Central to the Afro-Latin phenomenon is Africando, who provide three songs on Afro-Latin Party, each with a different African lead singer. In the 1960s and 1970s, the biggest names in African music—including such heavyweights as Youssou N'Dour and Salif Keita—were performing Latin music, thanks to recordings that came over from abroad. Cultural exchange between Cuba and the socialist governments in Mali and other parts of West Africa was a regular phenomenon. Performers like the Fania All Stars and Celia Cruz toured Africa and became musical icons.

In 1992, legendary Africando founders Ibrahim Sylla and Boncana Maïga traveled to New York to record with top local salsa musicians, many who were taken by surprise by these Africans performing and their phonetically learned Spanish lyrics. Interestingly, many of the band members on the three Africando tracks here, also play on other tracks on Afro-Latin Party.
---Editorial Reviews, amazon.com

Putumayo Presents: Afro-Latin Party might give the idea of frantic, sweaty rhythms, and mambos and salsas at hyperspeed. Instead, this collection focuses more on the genre called son, with some low-key salsa and rumba thrown in for good measure. Africando, the superstar band made up of West African and Latin musicians, claims most of the honors, with three out of ten tracks, highlighting the transatlantic connection and the supreme sense of musicianship. The biggest surprise, however, is Cubismo, who might be from Croatia, but who create a very convincing Cuban sound on "Morenita." Ska Cubano bring a slight touch of ska to the proceedings on the campy "Babalu," while Ronald Rubinel's Salsa Kolor bring Caribbean color from Martinique. In other words, Cuban music doesn't just belong in Cuba any more, and Latin music can't be restricted to the Americas (although this compilation does mostly draw from there). It's all good, well-played stuff, and might get people dancing. But ultimately it seems that tracks have been chosen for functionality within the idea of the compilation rather than their own outstanding qualities (which is possibly fair enough), and end up slightly anonymous. ---Chris Nickson, Rovi

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