

CDs of The Big Three Palladium Orchestra's *Live At the Blue Note* are available to purchase exclusively from the MUSE music shop on the Ground Floor Foyer.

There will also be a post-show CD signing with Machito Jr and Tito Rodriguez Jr after tonight's concert on the Ground Floor foyer outside MUSE.

The Big 3 Palladium Orchestra set will broadcast on BBC FOUR at 10–11pm on Friday 29 January (after the first part of the Latin Music USA documentary)

The La Excelencia set will broadcast on BBC FOUR at 10–11pm on Friday 5th February (after the second part of the Latin Music USA documentary)

FreeStage 6.30pm – 7.15pm

Roberto Pla and his Latin Ensemble

Don't miss the Colombian born salsa percussionist Roberto Pla, performing with his 12-piece Latin Ensemble. The founder of the UK's first salsa band Valdez, internationally acclaimed for his 1980s world-tour with pop megastars Boney M and having also toured around Europe and America with Joe Strummer (Ex Clash), legendary percussionist Carlos 'Patato' Valdez and Fania Allstars vocalist Adalberto Santiago, Roberto is hailed as the Colombian Godfather of Salsa music in the UK.

Dancing encouraged!

There will be one interval in tonight's concert. Smoking is not permitted anywhere on the Barbican premises. No cameras, tape recorders or any other recording equipment may be taken into the hall.



This programme is printed on 100% recycled materials.

The Barbican is provided by the City of London Corporation as part of its contribution to the cultural life of London and the nation.



"One of the best live acts on the planet... the feelgood flamboyance of an old-school soul revue." *Sunday Times*

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Sun 31 Jan 7:30pm

Jan Garbarek Group

The defining voice in European jazz returns with music from his new album *Dresden* (ECM).



Sat 20 Feb 7:30pm

African Soul Rebels

Oumou Sangare, Orchestre Poly Rythmo, Kalahari Surfers (Featuring Lesego Rampolokeng)

A triple bill of Africa's finest talent. ClubStage: **Afrikan Boy**



Mon 1 March 7:30pm

Nitin Sawhney & LSO – Yogoto No Yume

Nitin's thrilling new score is performed live to Japanese director Mikio Naruse's 1933 silent film *Yogoto No Yume* (Nightly Dreams)



Mon 8 Mar 7:30pm

Portico Quartet + support

Sat 27 Mar 7:30pm

Tomasz Stanko plays the music of Krzysztof Komeda



Tue 30 Mar 7:30pm

Abdullah Ibrahim

Rare London appearance of South African composer/pianist with his seven-piece band



Wed 7 Apr 7:30pm

Salif Keita

Returning to the UK in support of his upcoming album *Realism* (Nonesuch)



Fri 9 Apr

The Triffids
A Secret In The Shape Of A Song

Spectacular gathering of members of cult Australian heroes plus a star cast of guests to celebrate the songwriting genius of their late leader **David McComb**



Fri 16 Apr 7:30pm

Dee Dee Bridgewater: To Billie Holiday with Love

A tribute to Billie Holiday from one of today's greatest jazz voices. Dee Dee's daughter China Moses opens with a set dedicated to Dinah Washington



Tue 20 Apr 7:30pm

The Whale Watching Tour

Featuring **Nico Muhly, Ben Frost, Sam Amidon** and **Valgeir Sigurdsson**



The four artists behind the Bedroom Community record label bring their free-flowing special event to the UK for the first time

Tue 22 Apr 7:30pm

Kid Creole and the Coconuts

Featuring **Mariachi El Bronx, The La Linea Mariachi Horns** and guest vocalists



Tue 4 May 7:30pm

Cesaria Evora

Mon 10 May 7:30pm

Kept Impulses

Prepared piano player **Hauschka**, 12-string guitarist **James Blackshaw**, and singer/songwriter **Nancy Elizabeth** play their beautifully-matched music with hand-picked chamber ensemble



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Latin Music USA: The Big Three Palladium Orchestra

Featuring
**Machito Jr, Tito Rodriguez Jr,
Jimmy Bosch & Larry Harlow**

Plus **La Excelencia**

FreeStage
**Roberta Pla
and his Latin Ensemble**

24 Jan 7.30pm

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Latin Music USA: The Big Three Palladium Orchestra

Band

Mario Grillo (Machito Jr) timbales, leader

Tito Rodriguez Jr timbales, leader

Larry Moses trumpet

Steve Dawson trumpet

Neil Morley trumpet

Neil Waters trumpet

Wilfredo De La Torre alto sax

Carlos Lopez Real alto sax

Peter Wareham tenor sax

Martin Harman baritone

Gilberto Colon Jr piano

Guillermo Edghill bass

Eddie Montalvo conga

Pedro Laboy bongo

Sammy Gonzalez vocals

Guests

Larry Harlow piano

Emo Luciano vocals

Luis Rosario vocals

Jimmy Bosch trombone

Gabriel Fonseca violin

On Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays the queue used to snake around the block, from the corner of West 53rd Street right down around Broadway. The movie stars would have jumped it; it's hard to imagine the likes of Marlon Brando, James Dean and Gorgeous George Hamilton waiting in line. But the Palladium was Latin music's hippest, most famous nightclub. Here, at this open-to-everyone second floor concert hall, the musicians and dancers weren't just good. Oye! They trailed fire.

To perform at the Palladium you had to audition, which meant that only the best got to play. The vibe was high quality, high energy, relentless. The bands were invariably hot. But as everyone in the queue knew, three bands were hotter than others. Three bands, three bandleaders:

Machito, Tito Puente and Tito Rodriguez.

Without DJs to fill the spots between sets (who'd heard of such a thing?), the Big 3 went on in wham-bam succession, each trying to outdo the other. Gauntlets were thrown. Jaws dropped.

This was the 1950s; the mambo craze had exploded. Faster than the rumba, looser than the cha-cha-cha (though these cats played those too), mambo rocked. Machito – singer, conductor, maraca player, legend – released Babarabatiri, Asia Minor and hit after mambo hit. Tito Puente, El Rey of the timbales, struck gold with Mambozooka and Ran Kan Kan. Tito 'El Inolvidable (The Unforgettable)' Rodriguez churned out Mambo Gee Gee, Pop'n'Mambo, Mambo Madness. The original mambo kings, they burned up the Palladium bandstand, playing their songs of love.

The Big 3 mentored Latin jazz and salsa musicians subsequently snapped up by the salsa-defining Fania Records. They shared bills with Cuban giants Beny Moré, Orchestra Aragon, Celia Cruz. On Wednesday nights they made space for fun-filled contests: pie-eating competitions, skirt-raising showdowns and Mambo dancing eliminations, where a discerning crowd got to judge couples wearing numbers on their backs.

The Big 3 invited guests onstage to play with them; guests including bebopper Dizzy Gillespie, blind pianist George Shearing, crooner Sammy Davis Jr. and, in 1961, five-year-old Machito Jr - who played a timbale solo in Tito Puente's orchestra while standing on a chair next to El Rey.

By the time the Palladium shut its doors in 1966, tastes had shifted. The Big 3 kept on keeping on but separately, never on the same night. Their sons grew up reveling in their legacy, listening to



Machito Jr



Larry Harlow



Tito Rodriguez Jr and Machito Jr

their vinyl and honing their musical craft. Then when the time felt right – when it seemed as if the whole world was listening to the music of Machito, Puente and Rodriguez again – they set about creating an orchestra that would perform original charts from their fathers’ golden era, and feature musicians who had played in the original Palladium Ballroom.

Machito Jr, whose idea it was, had only figured to do “one gig for the history books.” But after the first show in 2001 blew everyone away the offers kept on coming. Hollywood Bowl, New York’s Belleayre Jazz Festival, festivals across Europe... If anyone doubted that this was the most brilliant Latin jazz ensemble this side of Havana, a 2004 live recording, *The Big 3 Palladium Orchestra: Live At the Blue Note*, with its ‘screaming horn section, frenzied rhythm section and bone-crunching arrangements’, sealed their reputation. The 2008 re-release underlined it.

And so the Big 3 Palladium Orchestra keeps on swinging into the 21st century, aided by heavy hitters such as Machito Jr’s fellow timbalero **Tito Rodriguez Jr** (who has led a revival of his father’s orchestra since 2008) and Puente orchestra veteran Joe Madera, the outfit’s current musical director. It’s not always easy to come together – just as Machito Jr. also maintains his own father’s orchestra, each of the musicians in this glorious line-up is in busy demand elsewhere – but come together they do.

“The selection of the musicians in the band is crucial for us,” Machito Jr. has said. “We want many things from them: musicianship, vast experience in the big band/orchestra format, knowledge of the music of the masters, the ability to bring it to life in the most authentic way we can and most importantly, having played with the

masters at different points in their musical life.”

A big Barbican welcome, then, to the Orchestra’s guest soloists: **Larry Harlow**, a living legend of Afro-Cuban music. The man behind the explosive trumpet and trombone sound of contemporary salsa; the first-ever piano player for the legendary Fania All-stars; a Latin Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award winner and the leader of his own Latin Legends of Fania orchestra.

Welcome, **Jimmy Bosch**: salsa’s Brutal Trombone. El Trombon Criollo. A bandleader, composer and lyricist at the vanguard of modern salsa; and a veteran of over 70 recordings with some of Latin music’s greatest. Welcome, too, to all of the Orchestra’s stellar guests.

Tonight, for one night only, the Barbican is the Palladium. The heat is on. The vibe is high. Look around. You never know who might turn up to play.

So, uno, dos, tres. Ready? Everybody mambo...

Dancing encouraged!

La Excelencia

(from 7.30pm)

José ‘Manos de Hierro’ Vazques-Cofresi congas

Julian Silva timbales

Charles ‘Swing’ Dilone bongo / cowbell

Willy Rodriguez keyboard

Gilberto Velazquez vocals



Jimmy Bosch



La Excelencia

Edwin Perez vocals
Emerito 'Junior' Beltran backing vocals
Jorgito 'Jorge' Bringas bass
Ronald Prokopez trombone
Jonathan Powell trumpet
Tokunori 'Kaji' Kajiwara trombone
Miki Hirose trumpet

When you're a young salsa outfit from the mean streets of New York, critical comparisons with your Nuyoric elders – Ruben Blades, Willie Colon, Hector Lavoe – are probably inevitable. But in a few short years La Excelencia has garnered the sort of superior praise formerly reserved for 1970s Fania flashbacks. "These young bloods are the real thing," declared Latin Beat Magazine, who stuck the 11-piece ensemble, in their hoodies, flat caps and jeans, on their cover.

La Excelencia's gritty, hard-driving sound is commanding respect from aficionados who had given up on modern salsa; from fans who hadn't got the horn over a new band since, well, since the Spanish Harlem Orchestra first burst onto the scene. The wait, they say, is over. Here, finally, is a band that manages to respect its roots while still looking forward. A band that sounds classic but never feels retro. A band that plays salsa that is scorching, swinging and imbued with social conscience. Mira! A band that drives pedal-to-the-metal, straight down the highway of real Latino life.

The kids love them too, of course. La Excelencia are just the sort of rocket-up-the-socket ambassadors the contemporary scene has been crying out for. It isn't just their pounding rhythms and deft arrangements, their acoustic piano and metales del sabor (flavoursome brass section). It isn't just that they mix Cuban, Colombian and Puerto Rican traditions in a diversity of eminently

danceable dance styles. It isn't only because their two albums – 2006's *Salsa Con Conciencia* and last year's lauded *Mi Tumbao Social* – are on club floor rotation everywhere from Asia to Latin America.

It's also the fact that this street-savvy crew do everything themselves. Like, everything. Promotion, scheduling, finances, management... Their commitment to pull together, to maintain their integrity and vision, has served to reinforce their rebel spirit and vindicate their ever-growing fan base. Theirs is an underground come overground, steamrolling boundaries as it goes.

La Excelencia have maintained their D.I.Y aesthetic ever since they were co-founded in 2005 by percussionists Julian Silva and Jose Vazquez-Cofresi, who'd both settled in New York in 2001. What they saw in the barrios went into their music: "We write what we feel is missing in salsa," says Silva of songs whose themes span racism and discrimination, unity and cross-cultural peace. "Neither should salsa discriminate," he adds. "Who says that salsa musicians have to look or play a certain way? It's ability that counts."

And what ability. Indeed, what excellence. Modern salsa now has a new name.

Programme notes © Jane Cornwall

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