



## ¡Viva Los Domingos!

Sundays in London are about to get a lot more Cuban as a new monthly residency fires up a crack team of *timba* musicians for its inaugural event

“Ahí na’ ma’!” (Let’s go!), yells Mixel Cabrera, sweating through his tight fawn jumper as he side-steps and swivels his hips, his ponytail extensions a monochromatic blur. A packed crowd waves their arms in the air, throwing their heads back to sing along to Spanish-language hits, including ‘Timbeando’ and ‘Tu Sonrisa’, squished back to allow the Cuban star to lead them in a circle dance and cheer on his impromptu wig-out on a Cuban *tres* guitar strapped high across his chest.

Raised in Santa Clara in central Cuba and Barcelona-based for a decade, Cabrera is a big deal in the *timba/salsa moderna* scene, thanks to collaborations with A-listers – including Alexander Abreu of Havana D’Primera and Pupy y Los Que Son, Son – and a clutch of albums showcasing his emotive tenor and a knack for penning tunes strafed with traditional elements from *bolero* and *changüí* to *chachachá*.

It’s live that Cabrera really gets to shine, and he won’t be the only touring Cuban singer to get this opportunity. That’s because this concert, at Juju’s Bar & Stage on Sunday, November 24, was the soft launch for a series of monthly Sunday shows featuring an international Cuban *timba* star backed by a house band of crack UK-based Cuban players. The event is the brainchild of Sambroso Sambroso, the Cuban events organisation behind *Sundays at Juju’s*, which has been London’s premiere hub for dancing to Cuban salsa since 2016, albeit with music provided by DJs rather than a band. With the

knowledge that all the best Cuban singers live in Europe and that *timba*, performed properly, needs upwards of ten players to feed its in-the-zone dynamism (a big ask, given inevitable visa wrangles), Sambroso Sambroso has a house orchestra, the Sambroso All Stars, pulsing with a who’s who of London-based Cuban (and Cuban-adjacent) musicians.

Here, under the aegis of bandleader/percussionist Hammadi Valdes, who has collaborated with *timba*-pioneer Chucho Valdés on on several albums including his Latin Grammy-winning *New Conceptions*, was bassist Frank Portuondo and *conguero* Oscar Martinez; Kishon Khan on one electric piano, Gaz Buckland on another; horn players who danced as they blew; backing vocalists whose soaring harmonies reflected the urgency of Cabrera’s delivery (‘How hard it is to dream when you go through life alone’, he furiously declaimed on ‘Goza La Vida’). All had rehearsed Cabrera’s repertoire, as they will for forthcoming guest singers, including Angel Yos, Laraine Cañizares and Teddy Fuentes, their empathetic interplay testament to the virtuosos in their ranks. For lovers of *timba* and live music, this evening felt like a big deal: London now has its own world-class *timba* orchestra. ‘Ahí na’ ma’; indeed. JANE CORNWELL

+ **Cuban Sundays** take place on the last Sunday of each month from January 2025 at Juju’s Bar & Stage, London