



OCTOBER 2015-Cuba: *The Conversation Continues* Arturo O’Farrill & The Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra (*Motéma Music*) by Joel Roberts

The timing of pianist Arturo O’Farrill’s new album could not have been better. O’Farrill and his Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra had just arrived in Cuba to make this ambitious recording when President Obama announced his plans to normalize diplomatic relations with Havana after more than half a century. That announcement gave the album new meaning and import not just as a statement about the intertwined musical traditions of the two countries, but as an on-the-scene reflection of a crucial moment in history. O’Farrill envisioned the two-disc set as a continuation of the musical conversation between the U.S. and Cuba that started with Dizzy Gillespie and Chano Pozo in the ‘40s and which, despite the long political divide, had never really stopped. The twodisc set features some two-dozen musicians from the two countries performing compositions by both American and Cuban artists. The tunes reflect the past, present and future of AfroCuban jazz, ranging from more traditional Latin big-band sounds, like Cotó’s pulsating “El Bombom”, to more experimental ones, such as O’Farrill’s free-spirited “Vaca Frita”, with DJ Logic spinning somewhat extraneous hip-hop grooves on turntables. Trombonist Earl McIntyre’s “Second Line Soca” brilliantly and organically merges the strongly related rhythms of New Orleans and Havana while Bobby Carcassés’ “Blues Guaguancó” most closely captures the infectious bebop spirit of Gillespie and Pozo, propelled by the composer’s scat vocals and an impressive solo turn by 16-year-old Cuban trumpeter Jesus Ricardo Anduz. The album’s centerpiece is O’Farrill’s “Afro Latin Jazz Suite”, a momentous tribute to his father Chico O’Farrill’s classic “AfroCuban Suite”, which had Charlie Parker as featured soloist. Here, O’Farrill enlists Rudresh Mahanthappa in that role and it proves to be an inspired choice, as the alto saxophonist weaves sultry, sinewy lines through the more-than-21 minute composition. The four high-energy movements trace the journey of Latin jazz and jazz itself, from “Mother Africa” through “All of the Americas”, before culminating in a powerful final movement that serves as a fitting coda not just for the album, but for the future of U.S.-Cuban relations: “What Now?” It’s rare when music and history mesh as fortuitously, eloquently and joyously as they do here. O’Farrill has made an important and hopeful statement about how art can survive and flourish and sometimes even lead the way, despite the foolishness of leaders.

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Arturo O'FARRILL

The Same Root

By Ted Panken | Photography by Rebecca Meek

If it's Sunday evening, Arturo O'Farrill is probably at Birdland. Since 1997, with occasional interruptions, he has spent his Sunday nights directing big bands at the New York venue—14 years with the Afro-Cuban Jazz Orchestra of Chico O'Farrill, which bears his father's name, and three years with its legatee, his own Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra (ALJO). In early June, not long after the release of ALJO's album *The Offense Of The Drum* (Motéma), O'Farrill opened the show with "Vaca Frita," a swing-to-mambo original infused with Gil Evans-esque brass, then Chico O'Farrill's "Trumpet Fantasy," which juxtaposed rumba-driven call-and-response sections with subtle restatements from the *canción* section of Chico's *Afro-Cuban Suite*.

O'Farrill rose from the piano, stated titles and personnel, and introduced "On The Corner Of Malecón And Bourbon," which he composed. "I do everything backwards," he said. "When I teach jazz history classes, I start with Cecil Taylor, then we go to Charlie Parker, Louis Armstrong and Charlie Mingus. We keep searching, and finally end with Scott Joplin. The beginnings of jazz and Latin come from the same root."

As on the version that appears on *The Offense Of The Drum*, O'Farrill's florid introduction evoked Rachmaninoff more than Taylor, but everything else was as stated. After the climactic two-trumpet passage, the applause was raucous. O'Farrill waited. "We've decided that Latin jazz is not defined by Cuban and Puerto Rican music," he declared, and then offered "Mercado en Domingo," a highlight of the new CD. Composed by Colombian pianist Pablo Mayor, it contained janky trumpet lines, tangoish sax unisons and Rafi Malkiel's fluid trombone solo, all goosed by a *porro* streetbeat, which would sound apropos in a New Orleans second line. Next was "Freilach a Nacht," a klezmer-ish minor blues propelled by a crackling merengue perhaps one degree removed from a polka. On the set-closer, a Ray

Santos mambo dedicated to Mario Bauzá, ALJO idiomatically channeled the soulful Afro-Cuban essence of its namesake.

Within this six-tune episode, O'Farrill, 54, encapsulated the overlapping streams that have defined his musical production since 2002, when Wynton Marsalis invited him to form the Afro-Cuban Jazz Orchestra of Lincoln Center.

His mandate was to assemble an exhaustive book of repertoire associated with his father, Machito, Bauzá, Tito Puente and other Afro-Caribbean heroes, and to perform it authentically, but with an attitude firmly implanted in the here-and-now. After JALC severed ties in 2005, he regrouped, substituting "Latin" for "Cuban" in the band's title. In 2007, supported by a non-profit called the Afro Latin Jazz Alliance, he launched an annual concert season at Symphony Space, which includes an annual *Musica Nueva* concert devoted to commissioned works—*The Offense Of The Drum* culls nine of them—reflecting Pan-American and Afro-diasporic perspectives.

A few days after the Birdland show, in a courtyard near the ALJO offices, O'Farrill discussed the roots and branches of his hemispheric sensibility. He recalled the in-studio response of Donald Harrison—on-site to perform the Mardi Gras Indian flagwaver "Iko, Iko," which closes the album—to a playback of "Mercado en Domingo." "Donald started laughing quietly," O'Farrill said. "He understood the idea I'm selling—that the same music he grew up with in the streets of New Orleans was happening in the streets of Bogotá or Lima or any major metropolis in South America where brass bands played African rhythms. We're playing each other's music, but from different entry points."

These connective portals reveal themselves in various guises in the otherwise disparate pieces that constitute *The Offense Of The Drum*. Colombian harp virtuoso Edmar Castaneda solos over a mélange of Colombian, Brazilian

and Afro-Cuban rhythms on his glistening "Cuarto de Colores." Spanish alto saxophonist-vocalist Antonio Lizana infuses flamenco soul into Erik Satie's "Gnossienne 3 (Tientos)," which he arranged. The hip-hop cadences of Nuyorican poet Christopher "Chilo" Cajigas' recitation-chant of "They Came," arranged by Jason Lindner, intersect with DJ Logic's turntable sound-painting.

The oppressive, martial sound of Japanese *taiko* drums, set ironically against a fugal form and a bolero cadence, opens the title track, which O'Farrill wrote in response to the gradual suppression of public drum circles in New York City. During the song's second half, liberation beats fuel the orchestra's rowdy splashes of color.

"Everything Arturo writes is really from the drums, although he writes around melody and conceptual things as well," ALJO drummer Vince Cherico said. "When we're learning something in rehearsals, he'll stop the horns and have the rhythm section—or maybe the conguero or me on drums—play the patterns over and over until it sinks in."

The album includes Vijay Iyer's 8-minute concerto "The Mad Hatter," which, Iyer says, "explores compatibilities between Carnatic rhythmic ideas I was thinking about and certain rhythms in clave."

"I see it as similar to Satie and Philip Glass in the way Vijay explores the idea of unfolding within a context of stasis," O'Farrill said. "It also intrigued me that he would have the audacity to fuck with clave."

Some ALJO band members found "The Mad Hatter" threatening, O'Farrill reported. One questioned the necessity of playing the first section in its ascribed 21/8 time signature, to which O'Farrill riposted, "Because we can't play 'Oye Como Va' forever." The next day the dissident called O'Farrill in the middle of a difficult commute. "The bridge is a mess, there's an overturned tractor-trailer, and I'm trying to

get to New York," he said. O'Farrill answered, "Brother, life isn't always 4/4—is it?"

"To me, that was a perfect object lesson," he continued. "If you define your music by constructs that are already in place, you're a fool. Now, I love 4/4. At my core, I'm a jazz pianist. I may have this big vision of what jazz could become, but my entry point into that conversation was bursting into tears when I first heard Herbie Hancock on 'Seven Steps To Heaven.' I wanted to play like Herbie more than anything in the world, because if you could float rhythmically over that bed of swing, like him, you were a complete human being with mastery over time and space."

Already a "mid-level" practitioner of Mozart and Chopin when he experienced his Hancock epiphany, O'Farrill, then 12, was just beginning to experiment with jazz and improvisational music. By 14, when he joined the Local 802 musicians union, he was playing with New York vets like Artie Simmons. "I didn't know much about harmony or stylistic nuance in jazz, but I had really good keyboard skills," O'Farrill said.

Over the course of three decades, O'Farrill evolved from efflorescent performer to the impresario-maestro of his maturity. Born in Mexico City, where his Havana-born father and Mexican-descended mother moved after the Communist Party consolidated power in Cuba, and a New Yorker since age 5, he experienced "tremendous ambivalence" about his cultural roots. "I thought the music of Chico, Machito and Tito Puente was secondary to jazz in importance and intellectual ability," he said.

"Growing up, the only Hispanics I knew were the school custodian and the basketball star. When I found out that Herbie had come from Bud Powell, I became a Bud Powell freak." Even so, while immersing himself in bebop and free-jazz, O'Farrill began playing on his father's jingle dates, beginning with a Bumble Bee tuna commercial.

"I knew what a *montuno* was, but I didn't understand how to make it work in the clave," he recalled of that session. "Sal Cuevas was playing bass, and told me that I had to study and get my shit together." O'Farrill purchased Papo Lucca records, learned the mechanics, but resisted the subtleties. He dropped out of The High School of Music & Art, worked as a bicycle messenger and led a peer-grouper sextet called the Untouchables, which in 1978 took a gig upstate "at a hole-in-the-wall bar, playing for beers." The proprietor notified Carla Bley, who lived down the road. She stopped by, liked what she heard, and soon thereafter hired O'Farrill to play a Carnegie Hall concert, initiating a four-year association.

"I'm much more Carla's child—or Charles Mingus' child—than Chico O'Farrill's child," O'Farrill said of his freewheeling aesthetics regarding musical narrative. "Composition was my father's end-all and be-all. He held jazz on a pedestal. Carla taught me that the notes are secondary to what you want to communicate: It's not the vehicle, but where the person who's driving wants to go."

As the '80s progressed, O'Farrill freelanced, worked more frequently on his father's projects, earned a degree in classical performance at Manhattan School of Music, and did extensive

fieldwork in Latin piano traditions with bassist-scholar Andy Gonzalez. "Andy told me that I needed to embrace where I come from, to understand how beautiful it is," O'Farrill said. "Almost immediately I realized that Latin piano was as sophisticated—maybe even more so—and as difficult to cop as anything Herbie was doing."

These investigations coincided with a burgeoning appreciation of the quality of Chico O'Farrill's corpus. "In my twenties, a friend had me listen to *Afro-Cuban Jazz Suite*," O'Farrill recounted. "He asked, 'Have you really heard this?' I went, 'Yeah... not really... no.'" He blames family dynamics. "Whatever legendary musician



he was, my father was also prone to the foibles and frailties of fatherhood," he said.

Youthful resentments dissipated during the '90s, as Chico, who died in 2001, experienced a late-career renaissance, spurred by the albums *Pure Emotion*, *Heart Of A Legend* and *Carambola*, which Arturo music-directed. "I learned how to arrange by looking at my father's scores. I learned how to compose by listening to my father's compositions. I learned about voicings and counterpoint. I also learned that my voice was very different than his. It wasn't just about mimicking, saying, 'This is a good way to do it.' It was also about, 'No, I reject this.'"

"I sensed that Arturo felt very much in Chico's shadow and fervently desired to establish his own identity," said *Offense* producer Todd Barkan, who managed Chico and produced his '90s albums. "But I never saw him be anything less than totally deferential and acquiescent to Chico's wishes."

"Chico's health was failing, so I was thrust into taking over the functions he'd done so well—standing in front of the guys, conducting them and emceeing," O'Farrill said. "I had to stop being a pianist. I had to pursue responsibilities I wasn't really sure I was prepared for."

After Marsalis played "Trumpet Fantasy" with the Chico O'Farrill Orchestra at Alice Tully Hall in 1996, Arturo approached him for advice. "It interested me that he assembled this orchestra that was building a canon of American jazz, and I asked him—or maybe his assistant—for thoughts on how we could develop a relationship with an institution that might help us create a similar repertory orchestra," O'Farrill recalled. "A few years later, Wynton said, out of the blue, 'I really like your idea, and I want to give you a home at Jazz at Lincoln Center.'"

O'Farrill has bittersweet feelings about the association, which JALC severed a year after entering its high-maintenance quarters at Columbus Circle. But he now sees the break as a blessing in disguise, by which ALJO was afforded the opportunity, as Barkan puts it, "to venture into the world on its own and be its own person."

"That Wynton would open up his platform to us was extraordinarily moving to me," O'Farrill said. "I learned a lot of lessons from him. He never told us what to do or how to do it. At the end, I asked him point-blank if we had done something wrong. He answered that we represented the House of Swing with great respectability, but that JALC was under great financial duress and would no longer be able to house us."

Both institutions share a commitment to educational initiatives as well as an insistence that its members have technical expertise in matters of performing, composing and arranging. Each takes a non-preservationist approach to performing "classic" repertoire, operating on the principle that to bring forth new work is just as important as the obligation to preserve past glories.

"My model since the Lincoln Center days is to look for musicians who are multi-layered, multi-cultured, flexible stylistically and artistically," O'Farrill said. "I like to put a younger musician next to a veteran and hope each will influence the other's thinking."

In his embrace of the music of the Americas, O'Farrill draws not only on extensive travels through South and Central America, and bandstand interaction with musicians from those cultures, but frequent visits to Cuba since 2002.

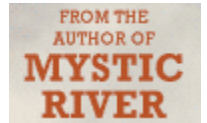
"I learned that the sounds and sights of Cuba indelibly shaped my father's aesthetic and cultural roots, his sense of harmonic counterpoint and Afro-folkloric counterpoint," O'Farrill explained. "The more time I spend in Cuba, the more I realize it's the land I come from, and also that Cuba is part of Latin America in very concrete ways."

O'Farrill cited his next recording, a project called "The Conversation Continued," for which ALJA has commissioned composers in the United States and in Cuba to imagine what might have happened had the U.S. not imposed an embargo. The program will comprise next season's Musica Nueva concert at Symphony Space.

Of Mexican descent on his mother's side, O'Farrill said he can't "identify more as a Cuban than as a Mexican." He adds, "I feel not so much Mexican or Cuban, but I feel Pueblo. I relate to the pace of South American-Latin American life. I like the noise of children in the streets, and bright colors and sounds, and food smells, and people practicing on terraces. When I first returned to Cuba, I remember walking down the street and thinking, 'This feels like home.' I've had that feeling in Mexico. I've also had that feeling in Lima, and in Cali, and in Santiago."

More than anything, though, O'Farrill's need to create on the edge, in an experimental, cross-disciplinary context, emanates from his New York origins. "Everything I do—being a bicycle messenger as a teenager, running a non-profit now, my musical projects—I take great chances," he said. "What makes it exciting is that it could crash and burn."

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Arturo O’Farrill: (Don’t) Take Five

By LIZ ROBBINS SEPT. 12, 2014

Arturo O’Farrill, the Grammy Award-winning pianist and composer, spends his Sundays in a frenzy of improvisation. By day he directs a youth orchestra, the Fat Afro Latin Jazz Cats. By night he takes the stage himself with his own group, the Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra, at Birdland. On Sept. 20, the two groups will play together at Pueblo Harlem, a cultural festival. Mr. O’Farrill, 54, lives in Park Slope with his wife, Alison Deane, 62, a classical pianist. “I made one rule for myself, and I really try to live it: Play music you love, with people you love, for people you love,” Mr. O’Farrill said. “If I can’t be that kind of musician, I’ll drive a cab. Creating music based on art and giving away from your spirit is more important than making a living.”

SWIM GYM My alarm is usually set for 5:40 a.m. The pool at the Prospect Park Y opens at 7. I get to the gym at 6 and immediately hit the treadmill. I do 40 minutes on the treadmill. I do an abdominal machine and an arm thing for 90 minutes. I’ve developed a bit of a rotator cuff problem because of conducting. I won’t give up swimming, even if it kills me. I love the rhythm of it. I do 20 laps, go in the steam room, and I do yoga stretches.

PROTEIN HIT After that, I will probably have an egg. Alison will make it for me. Sometimes I go from the gym to the office, in which case I’ll pick up a bagel from the Bagel Hole.

SIT IN THE PEWS It’s now 9 or 9:30 and I head to All Saints Episcopal Church on Seventh Avenue and Seventh Street. I used to be the choir director, the organ master, years ago. I try to keep a low profile.

TWEEN/TEEN DRILLS Usually, next I rush over to Fat Cat. Last year, the demand was so great, we had to make two big bands and I gave them lucha libre names. I called Band A Los Gatos Gordos, the fat cats — that’s the older band. The

second band, the younger band, I called Los Perros Flacos, the skinny dogs.

EARLY CRESCENDO For me, learning music and playing music and learning your instrument has incredible parallels for our day-to-day existence as human beings. All the ideas of discipline, and having a sense of yourself and translating that to music, that's all part of life's journey. When I'm able to see the lights click on in their eyes, that's completely energizing to me. By the end of that three hours, I've hit the peak of my day. But it's nowhere near over.

QUIET TIME At that point, I usually go home and have either brunch or order something. And then I attempt to sit and relax for a period of two hours. Sometimes I'll go to my studio — Eighth Avenue and 17th Street. It's my sanctuary. Or I nap. Sometimes I can't get myself to sleep because I'm such a mess. If I am able to, I'll sleep from 5 to 6:30 or 5:30 to 7, at which point I get ready for Birdland.

GOING SOLO My wife? No, she comes to Rareland, birdly. [He giggles.] Birdland, rarely! She's an incredible pianist. Alison has that gift of a really unaffected, simple, lean, natural talent. She's seen me play a lot over the years; we've been married 22 years.

GET WITH THE PROGRAM I drive to Birdland. I'm tired, I don't want to get on the train. I'll get there an hour before the show, go backstage and pick out the repertoire for the evening, and it's always different. My A.D.D.-ness extends to my programming. I'm bored so easily. My bandmates think I'm nuts because we try to play a different program all the time. I make them rehearse once a month. I'm always trying to mix up Peruvian music with hip-hop, Colombian music with Mexican mariachi.

EXTENDED PLAY Shows are supposed to be 60 minutes. I usually stretch them to 70 to 75 minutes. In between, I go out and meet fans, sign autographs and take pictures. It's insane. The gig ends at about 12:15, 12:30.

DRINKS AFTER WORK At the end of any gig, I am so worked up. I put out so much energy. When I finish a set, or a concert, I'm drenched. I have to take three shirts to Birdland. For the first set, the second set and for afterward. I wear a white cotton shirt. Usually with one of my oldest friends in the world, Jim Seeley, an incredible trumpet player, we pack up and go to the Monro Pub in Park Slope.

CODA I get home at 2:30, 3. At that point, I fall asleep in probably about two seconds.

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The International Review of Music

Jazz With An Accent: Drummin' Back Out Into the World — CDs by Arturo O'Farrill and Ginger Baker

August 6, 2014

By Fernando Gonzalez

Arturo O'Farrill & The Afro-Latin Jazz Orchestra

The Offense of the Drum (Motema)

Maestro Mario Bauzá — trumpeter, saxophonist and music director of Machito and His Afro- Cubans, direct link between Dizzy Gillespie and Chano Pozo and a key figure in blending jazz and Afro-Cuban rhythms — scoffed at the label Latin Jazz.

"What they call Latin jazz is not Latin jazz. That's Afro-Cuban jazz," he would say in his inimitable growl. It wasn't just that "Latin jazz" blurred the Afro-Cuban contribution. It was also that, for him, Latin jazz suggested a different, more varied mix — incorporating Argentine *tangos*, Colombian *cumbias*, Venezuelan *joropos* or Puerto Rican *bomba y plena*. He would then name artists such as Paquito D'Rivera, Gato Barbieri or Jorge Dalto as worthy practitioners.

It was the 1980s and it was a short roll call. Today, he would've had a much longer and broader list.

But Bauzá would have been specially proud of the work of pianist and bandleader Arturo O'Farrill, the son of his friend and collaborator, the great Cuban arranger and bandleader Chico O'Farrill.

(<https://irom.files.wordpress.com/2014/08/arturo-ofarrill-cd-drum.jpg>) For 12 years, sometimes seemingly hidden in plain view, Arturo O'Farrill has carried on an extraordinary effort, not only organizing and keeping alive an 18-piece big band but doing so while also expanding the vocabulary of Afro-Cuban jazz into a truly Pan-Latin Latin jazz. By now, the book of the Afro-Latin Jazz Orchestra (ALJO) includes not only some of the great standards of Afro-Cuban jazz but also pieces blending in *tangos*, *choros* and Peruvian *festejos*. In *The Offense of The Drum*, O'Farrill both takes it further out and brings it all home. With the drums as the



foundational center of the music, the ALJO connects diverse traditions creatively but also rather organically.

So a tribute to the shared spirits and grooves in Havana and New Orleans, a musical dialogue in “On The Corner of Malecón and Bourbon,” flows into a sly Colombian *porro* groove and allusions to Colombian *papayera* band (a type of brass street band) on “Mercado en Domingo.” But exploring the groove doesn’t preclude a reflective “Gonossiene 3 (Tientos),” which explodes Erik Satie’s music Arabic elements with a flamenco perspective.

And O’Farrill is neither afraid of collaborations — such as those with pianist Vijay Iyer (the odd metered “The Mad Hatter”) and DJ Logic (“They Came” which also explores spoken poetry) — nor having a good time, as with the eminently danceable *salsa* track, “Alma Vacía,” or the classic “Iko Iko” – featuring alto saxophonist Donald Harrison, a Big Chief Mardi Gras Indian – reinvented here as a joyous, bouncing Cuban/New Orleans party groove.

Throughout, the arranging is imaginative, exploring the character of the music and the instrumental possibilities of the band, while the soloing (especially by O’Farrill and Iyer on piano, Rafi Malkiel, euphonium and Harrison on sax) is consistently smart and purposeful. Creative, swinging and open to the world, *The Offense of The Drum* is Latin jazz at its best.

Offense of the Drum Electronic Press Kit ([//www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_p6RTyHjdg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x_p6RTyHjdg))

* * * * *

Ginger Baker

Why? (Motema)

While lasting only two years, 1966 – 1968, the British trio Cream had an oversized impact in modern popular music. At different times, Cream has been claimed as ancestor and inspiration by rock musicians of nearly all stripes, from fusion to heavy metal.

But jazz has more than a fair claim to their legacy too. In fact, one doesn’t need to go back to their epic version of Skip James’ “I’m So Glad,” in the group’s final *Goodbye*, to connect the dots between the jazz tradition and their instrumental virtuosity, their approach to improvisation and open-ended treatment of the blues. Set aside the pop-rock imagery for a second and think of, say, a saxophone playing the guitar lines and you are closer to an avant-jazz trio than a rock band.

That shouldn’t be a surprise. The two guys working the engine room of Cream, bassist Jack Bruce and drummer Ginger Baker, were educated in, and fans of, jazz. Guitarist Eric Clapton was a different story — and his post-Cream, MOR career is evidence enough. In his autobiography, Bruce seems to suggest that two-thirds of Cream thought of it as a jazz trio adding, jokingly one would hope, that they just wouldn’t tell Clapton about it.

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Arturo O’Farrill's New Album and Historic Premiere

Clave's favorite son shines with "The Offense of the Drum"



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Arturo O'Farrill (left) at the Apollo Theater, NYC, May 2014

By David Garten

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08/01/14

[Aidan Levy](#)

Even for a venue as legendary as Harlem’s Apollo Theater, May 10, 2014 was a special day. Pianist Arturo O’Farrill, son of the late Cuban bandleader and composer Chico O’Farrill, honored the 65th anniversary of his

father’s groundbreaking *Afro-Cuban Jazz Suite*, recorded in 1950 by Machito and Charlie Parker, and premiered his own reimagining, the *Afro Latin Jazz Suite*, commissioned by the Apollo as part of its 80th season. The performance was part of this year’s Harlem Jazz Shrines Festival, and featured O’Farrill and his Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra (ALJO) plus some very special guests: saxophonists Rudresh Mahanthappa and Billy Harper, pianist Randy Weston, drummer Lewis Nash and turntablist DJ Logic.

O’Farrill also celebrated the release of *The Offense of the Drum* (Motéma), the ALJO’s fourth album, centered on a pan-Latin rhythmic palette featuring dozens of different percussion sources, from the *shekere* to the turntable. The album, like the *Afro Latin Jazz Suite*, reflects the spirit of multiculturalism in jazz that the 54-year-old pianist champions. “I realized that the original *Afro Cuban Jazz Suite* didn’t really deal with Africa, it dealt with Cuba,” says O’Farrill, who recently sat down for an interview at the Harlem School of the Arts, where the ALJO have been artists-in-residence for the past year. “The diaspora didn’t just come and land in New Orleans. These rhythms come from Africa, but they expanded in the language of the new world.”

For O’Farrill, who studied classical piano and composition at the Manhattan School of Music, the Aaron Copland School of Music at Queens College and the Conservatory of Music at Brooklyn College, the *Afro Latin Jazz Suite* re-contextualizes the innovations of his father in a broader context: the European classical tradition, Balinese gamelan, minimalism and hip-hop.

With a structure analogous to the original, O’Farrill develops this multicultural conceit over three movements: “Mother Africa” blends a chordal structure inspired by Olivier Messiaen and complex *djembe* rhythms that elude western notation; “The Americas” weds Steve Reich and a festejo polyrhythm; “What Now?” incorporates DJ Logic’s syncopated scratching and Mahanthappa’s microtonal harmony. “At its roots, jazz is a world music and it’s a hybrid music, and to continue that tradition with respect to how the American cultural landscape grows is very important,” says Mahanthappa. “I think harmonically and rhythmically, Arturo checked out my work and found a way to write for that using his vocabulary as a composer.”

Where the *Afro-Cuban Jazz Suite* synthesized Cuban clave and bebop, the *Afro Latin Jazz Suite* synthesizes Latin rhythms with Mahanthappa’s Carnatic aesthetic and hip-hop. “Rudresh to me represents what Charlie Parker did to my father,” says O’Farrill. “It’s as though you’re looking at these thousands-of-years-old African drums and you can see the lineage directly to DJ Logic and the turntable. I see the connection between the Wu-Tang Clan and Albert Ayler, Sun Ra and the Art Ensemble of Chicago. Some people want to separate these schools, but they are so beautifully interconnected.”

Randy Weston, who performed his 20-minute “African Sunrise” at the Apollo with Billy Harper on tenor saxophone, was instrumental in broadening O’Farrill’s perspective. Not only did the iconic pianist perform the piece with Chico O’Farrill in 1998, also alongside Harper, his 1959 piece “Little Susan” was coincidentally inspired by O’Farrill’s future wife, concert pianist Alison Susan Deane. “The meaning of the piece is that African culture is rising,” says Weston. “It’s like when a plant breaks through the sidewalk: It arises, and that’s why it’s called ‘African Sunrise.’”

Consistent with that vibrant tradition, *The Offense of the Drum* features eclectic guest artists across a cross-cultural continuum: Colombian harpist Edmar Castañeda on opener “Cuarto de Colores,” socially conscious rapper Christopher “Chilo” Cajigas on the reggaeton-inflected “They Came,” composed by Jason Lindner, and saxophonist Donald Harrison on spirited closer “Iko Iko,” the New Orleans standard.

O’Farrill’s “On the Corner of Malecón and Bourbon” dramatizes the inextricable link between Latin culture and the broader jazz context, a backwards history lesson that starts with the harmonic texture of Cecil Taylor and transitions chronologically to Jelly Roll Morton, interpolating *son montuno* rhythms. He also bridges Latin tradition, French Impressionism and odd-metered contemporary jazz: “Gnossienne 3” is a recasting of Erik Satie with Andalusian, Arabic and African rhythms, while Vijay Iyer’s “The Mad Hatter,” dedicated to Arturo

O’Farrill, appropriates Latin phrasing over a 21/8 time signature.

This December, O’Farrill is planning his next foray into jazz cosmopolitanism, taking the ALJO to Cuba. “What would happen if Dizzy Gillespie and Chano Pozo had not been separated by death?” says O’Farrill, who is an outspoken critic of the Cuban trade embargo. “If they had continued their conversation, we would see a very different interpretation of what jazz was inexorably going toward.”

That interpretation revolves around the clave, the 2/3 rhythmic pattern at the heart of Latin jazz. “The clave is really an exercise in tension and release,” says O’Farrill. “The 2 side is solidly on beat and the 3 side has a syncopated tension, so the clave is really the center of all great human storytelling and struggle.”

Originally published in [August 2014](#)

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Arturo O'Farrill And The Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra On JazzSet

by BECCA PULLIAM

July 31, 2014 3:20 PM ET



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Courtesy of Lena Adasheva

Web-Only Extra

**Chico O'Farrill
Orchestra Performs
"Perdido" (1998)**

Arturo O'Farrill is at the center of a dynasty between his father, composer Chico O'Farrill (1921-2001), and his son Adam, on trumpet here today. Zack, a younger son, plays drums, while Arturo's wife, Alison Deane, is a classical pianist and professor at City College in New York.

O'Farrill's energy is a joyful force. His conducting is physical, his

Set List

"Rumba Urbana" (Oscar Hernandez)

"Wise Latina" (A. O'Farrill)

Selections from *Three Afro-Cuban Jazz Moods*: "Calidoscopio," "Exuberante" (C. O'Farrill), featuring Jon Faddis (trumpet)

"Caravan" (Juan Tizol), featuring Ivan Renta (tenor sax), Adam O'Farrill (trumpet), Earl McIntyre (trombone)

"Song for Chico" (Dafnis Prieto), featuring Bobby Porcelli (alto sax)

"El Sur" (Gabriel Alegría), featuring Jim Seeley (trumpet)

piano playing powerful, as he launches "Rumba Urbana" by Oscar Hernandez of the Spanish Harlem Orchestra. Then O'Farrill takes a moment to explain that he wrote "A Wise Latina" in tribute to Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, and took the title straight from the confirmation hearings. A few days after their performance at the 2010 Newport Jazz Festival, the Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra played "A Wise Latina" at the Bronx Children's Museum for Dream Big Day.

Trumpet guest Jon Faddis joins this Grammy Award-winning orchestra for two movements — subtitled "Calidoscopico" and "Exuberante" — from the three-part *Afro-Cuban Jazz Moods* by Chico O'Farrill. Appreciate Chico's controlled build-up to "Exuberante." Those are big shoes to fill, and Arturo is primed for this role.

Father Chico was born in 1921 in Cuba. He left the island in 1960, never to return, but son Arturo has made several trips, most recently in the autumn of 2010. Arturo, his family and the full Chico O'Farrill Orchestra — Arturo's legacy ensemble, every

Sunday at Birdland in New York — traveled to Varadero to play with a local orchestra devoted to Chico's music. Until now, these Cuban musicians did not have printed scores or parts; they had to listen to the albums and transcribe the music. That is a great way to learn, but it's painfully slow. As a gift, Arturo hand-delivered full scores for two Chico O'Farrill compositions and two of his own. He says it was very emotional — "a tearjerker" — to make and receive this gift. For more tears, the Chico O'Farrill Afro-Cuban Jazz Orchestra played a program in Arturo's grandfather's birthplace with great young musicians from the island and pianist Chucho Valdés participating. As host Dee Dee Bridgewater tells this story on *JazzSet*, you hear music from our 1998 recording of the Chico O'Farrill orchestra, Arturo on piano, which is available on this page.

The ALJO's new Grammy-nominated album is *Forty Acres and a Burro* — the winner is announced Feb. 12 in Los Angeles — and they wrap up at Newport with a piece by Gabriel Alegría from Peru, "El Sur" (the South), to let you know that their sphere is ever-expanding. The ALJO is in residence at Symphony Space in New York.





Courtesy of Lena Adasheva

Personnel

Piano and musical direction: Arturo O'Farrill; trumpets: John Bailey, Seneca Black, Adam O'Farrill, Jim Seeley; saxophone: Peter Brainin, David DeJesus, Jason Marshall, Bobby Porcelli, Ivan Renta; trombone: Takunori Kajiwara, Earl McIntyre, Mark Miller, Gary Valente; bass: Ricardo Rodriguez; drums and timbales: Vince Cherico; bongos and percussion: Joe Gonzales; congas: Roland Guerrero.

Credits

Recording by Steve Remote of Aura-Sonic Location Recording. Surround Sound remix by Duke Markos. Thanks to Garrett Nichols.

Featured Artist

Arturo O'Farrill

- First Listen: Arturo O'Farrill & The Afro Latin Orchestra, 'The Offense Of The Drum'
- Arturo O'Farrill: Tiny Desk Concert
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Jon Faddis

SEPTEMBER 25, 2014



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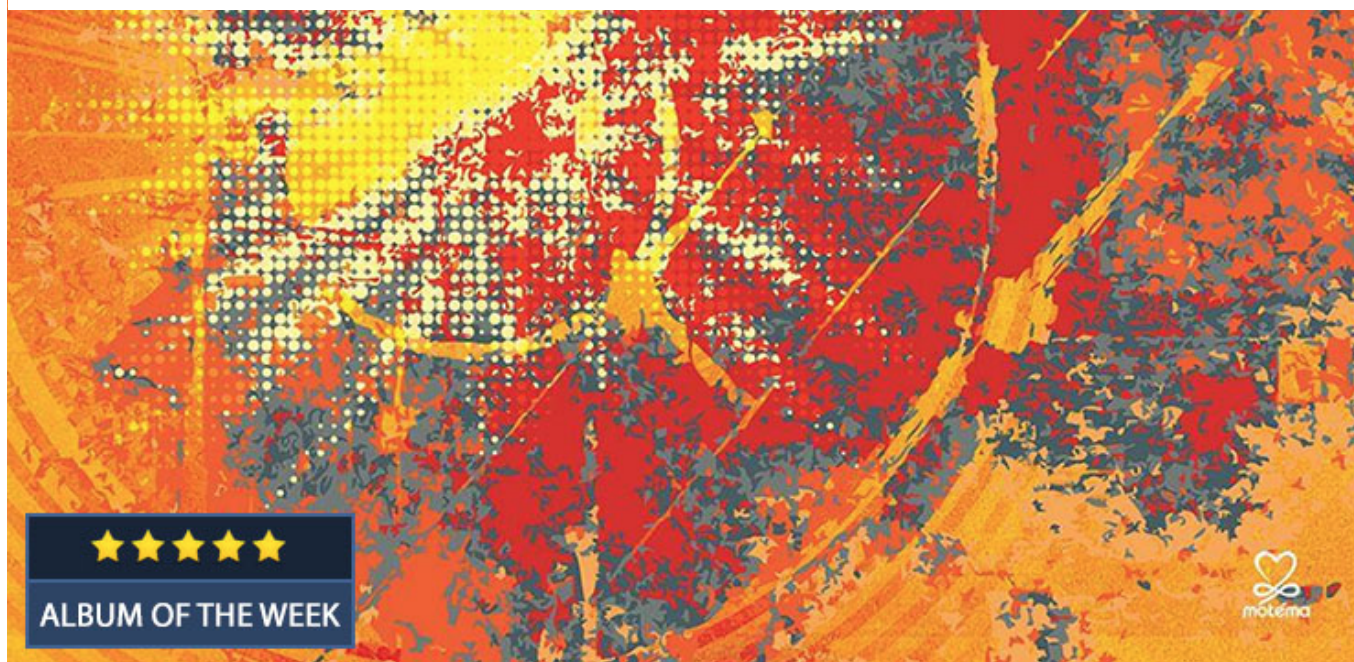
Arturo O’Farrill and ALJO: The Offense of the Drum

July 20, 2014 by [Raul da Gama](#)



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SEPTEMBER 25, 2014



Chilo

SOUNDCLOUD

They Came featuring Arturo O'Farrill and the Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra with DJ Logic

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It has been authoritatively stated that Chico O'Farrill was one of the most important composers and big band arrangers and conductors in the idioms of jazz or Latin Jazz. His son, the inimitable Arturo O'Farrill is not very far behind. In fact he may be closer to his father (although he might deny this) than he or anyone would care to imagine. With a number of recordings, including solo piano ones, to his credit in recent years—recordings such as *Song for Chico*, *Risa Negra*, and *Live in Brooklyn* and perhaps, most memorable of all *The Noguchi Sessions*—Mr. O'Farrill is actually every bit the equal of his father, Chico. And now, with his Motema debut, *The Offense of the Drum* the young Mr. O'Farrill has reinforced his position in the world of music as a composer, pianist and all-round musical director. His ensemble, The Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra is a powerful vehicle for his voice, an authoritative one indeed.

Arturo O'Farrill's music is informed by a studied sense of history, which is eminently displayed on this album. He is part of a tradition that includes his father and a host of other luminaries who established the tradition and includes, as big band directors go, also Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Frank Foster and Thad

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SEPTEMBER 25, 2014

2nd line strut, blended into Puerto Rican and other Latin folkloric motifs on “On the Corner of Malecón and Bourbon”) with gestures that are graceful and masterly.

The music on this recording seems to be a suite written around its centerpiece, “The Offense of the Drum,” a monumental piece that delves into the musical roots of the African origin of this music. In fact, it goes even further by suggesting the primordial nature of the music itself. As it touches upon these origins the sophistication of musical influences in the music begin to unfold, but not before an earth-shaking collision of cultures occurs. The premonitions for this are actually established oddly enough in Mr. O’Farrill’s take on Erik Satie’s “Gnossienne 3,” from its thunderous opening bars to the ponderous development of the song through a long cadenza, played largely on the saxophone. The rhythm suggests more than a march here; its rhythmic ululations go as far to suggest the rowing of slave-ships from the old countries on their intercontinental voyage and the Spanish vocal paints the picture of this odyssey in a majestic and melancholic manner.

Mr. O’Farrill’s deep commitment to art and the socio-political aspects of the nature of the artist’s obligation to depressed and marginalized sections of society is as bold and audacious as ever. The brilliant piece “They Came,” referring to the native peoples of Puerto Rico is serious in its power and substance. It is also a master-stroke to present this in the rap idiom—an almost umbilical link to struggle. Here Christopher “Chilo” Cajigas is outstanding in the delivery of the words, mixing strident imagery with lyricism. Not only Mr. Cajigas, but also the tenor saxophonist, Iván Renta, alto saxophonist Bobby Porcelli and trumpeter Seneca Black are all superb. Each of these musicians leads their sections into what is the finest tonal panoply of sound. Even a cursory listen of “The Offense of the Drum” will bear out the importance of this observation. However, ultimately this is maestro Arturo O’Farrill’s record and what a masterpiece it is.

Track Listing: Cuarto de Colores; They Came; On the Corner of Malecón and Bourbon; Mercado en Domingo; Gnossienne 3 (Tientos); The Mad Hatter; The Offense of the Drum; Alma Vacía; Iko Iko.

Personnel: Arturo O’Farrill: piano and Musical Director; Iván Renta: tenor saxophone; Peter Brainin: tenor saxophone; Bobby Porcelli: alto saxophone; David DeJesus: alto saxophone; Jason Marshall: baritone saxophone; Seneca Black: trumpet; Jim Seeley: trumpet; Jonathan Powell: trumpet; Tokunori Kajiwarra: trombone; Frank Cohen: trombone; Rafi Malkiel: trombone and euphonium; Earl McIntyre: bass trombone and tuba; Gregg August: bass; Vince Cherico: drums; Roland Guerrero: congas; Joe Gonzalez: bongos and bell; Pablo Bilbraut: percussion (8); Miguel Blanco: conductor (5, 8); Christopher “Chilo” Cajigas: spoken word (2); Edmar Castañeda: harp (1); Ayanda Clarke: djembe (7); DJ Logic: turntables (2); Jonathan Gómez:

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SEPTEMBER 25, 2014

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About Arturo O’Farrill and the Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra

The GRAMMY award winning Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra (ALJO), led by pianist, composer, and director Arturo O’Farrill, brings together the drama of big band jazz, the culture of Latin music, and the virtuosity of eighteen of the world’s most accomplished solo musicians. Twelve years of critically acclaimed performances internationally, have firmly established the ALJO as the standard-bearer for creative interpretation of Latin jazz greats such as Tito Puente, Frank “Machito” Grillo, and Chico O’Farrill, as well as the driving force behind new commissions from Latin music’s most talented composers and arrangers. Presenting programs that range from the very best in dance music sure to bring audiences to their feet, to repertoire that pushes the genre forward, the ALJO commissions and performs innovative compositions and big band arrangements by Vijay Iyer, Miguel Zenón, Dafnis Prieto, Guillermo Klein, Pablo Mayor, Arturo O’Farrill, Michele Rosewoman, Emilio Solla, Papo Vazquez, and many others. [Read more...](#)



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MUSIC

Cubans with a New York Twist

This isn't your father's Cuban jazz.

By LARRY BLUMENFELD

June 23, 2014 6:30 p.m. ET



Arturo O'Farrill and his Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra at the Apollo this year. *Getty Images*

To close a May concert at Harlem's Apollo Theater, Arturo O'Farrill led his orchestra through "The Afro Cuban Jazz Suite," a landmark work by his father, the late composer and bandleader Chico O'Farrill. That suite, first recorded in 1950, imagined anew innate connections between American and Cuban idioms and among folkloric, jazz and classical forms.

If the rest of the Apollo Theater concert built on that legacy, it did so with a wide-ranging ambition Chico O'Farrill could scarcely have imagined. At some points a turntablist, DJ Logic, stood beside the percussionists, lending textures and rhythms by manipulating LPs. Throughout, the music was grounded as much in styles native to Peru and Colombia, and in the adventurous attitudes of musicians such as pianist and composer Carla Bley, one of Mr. O'Farrill's earliest mentors, as in his direct inheritance. This was distinctly not his father's Afro Latin jazz.

Elsewhere in Harlem and later in May, alto saxophonist Yosvany Terry performed at Minton's alongside

his brother, bassist Yuniory Terry, in a sextet led by their father, Eladio "Don Pancho" Terry. The Terry brothers, too, were born into heady Cuban tradition. Don Pancho is the violinist and founding director of the Orquesta Maravillas de Florida, a Cuban *charanga* band, and master of the *chekeré*, a beaded gourd used for percussion. At Minton's, the sextet performed a mixture of traditional *charanga* repertoire and more forward-leaning music Yosvany composed for his working quintet.

Musicians with roots in Cuba who now live in New York—having absorbed influences and made associations that span borders and genres—bring new sonic possibilities and fresh perspectives to their heritages. In turn, they invigorate New York's scene. Two recent CDs—"The Offense of the Drum" (Motéma), from Arturo O'Farrill and the Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra, and Yosvany Terry's "New Throned King" (5Passion)—embody such promise through distinctly different approaches.

Mr. O'Farrill, 54, was born in Mexico and grew up in Manhattan. As part of his nonprofit Afro Latin Jazz Alliance since 2007, the orchestra has developed an expansive aesthetic that plays out through commissioned pieces for concert seasons. "The world of Latin jazz has exploded," he said recently at his Brooklyn home. "My father did what he did in his era because that was the world he knew. In my world, there's Peru and Colombia and Ecuador and Venezuela and more—plus, of course, Cuba. For the past seven or eight years, I've explored these connections for all their beauty, power and range."

Mr. O'Farrill's CD opens with "Cuarto de Colores," a celebration of Colombian harp composed by Edmar Castañeda, who plays that instrument with remarkable command. Among its most stirring pieces are Pablo Mayor's "Mercado en Domingo," based in the Colombian marching-band tradition; "Gnossienne 3 (Tientos)," for which Spanish arranger Miguel Blanco invested French composer Erik Satie's music with the pained vocals and curled melismas of flamenco; and "The Offense of the Drum," an ambitious O'Farrill composition incorporating Japanese *taiko* drums. That such range forms a coherent musical whole lends credence to his mission.

Mr. Terry, 43, is an especially dynamic presence in New York. In addition to his quintet, he recently formed Bohemian Trio, with a cellist and pianist, and composed the score for "Makandal," an opera conceived and written by Carl Hancock Rux, scheduled for its Harlem Stage premiere in November. In performance, Mr. Terry often picks up the *chekeré* his father taught him to play. His new CD explores a tradition more closely related to his mother's lineage: *arará* culture, drawn from the former West African kingdom of Dahomey. The group he assembles here, Ye-Dé-Gbé, includes Cuban musicians well versed in *arará*, such as percussionists Román Díaz, Pedrito Martínez and Sandy Pérez, and players with no prior exposure, such as drummer Justin Brown. Though layered with jazz improvisation and, in some spots, electronics, the music's core is formed by *arará* chants and drumming, undisturbed. "I could have composed something simply based on that legacy," Mr. Terry said. "But I left this material the way it was, to interact with everything else." This music remains functional: a recent Manhattan album-release performance included a costumed dancer, Francisco Barroso.

These two new recordings pursue very different ends yet share some qualities. Each meaningfully incorporates DJ culture—on Mr. O'Farrill's CD, through DJ Logic's turntables; on Mr. Terry's album, via Haitian DJ Val Jeanty, whose constructed soundscapes include recorded samples of ceremonies. Each features spoken-word poetry: During "They Came," on Mr. O'Farrill's CD, Christopher "Chilo" Cajigas explores Puerto Rican identity in the U.S.; on Mr. Terry's CD, Ishmael Reed celebrates women warriors from Dahomey. On each recording, eras and borders collapse within a track or even a passage—as when Mr. O'Farrill's piano playing moves from ragtime to Cuban *montuno* to something akin to free-jazz, and when Mr. Terry's playing evokes Ornette Coleman's extrapolated blues atop ritual-based handclaps and chants.

The cross-cultural truth behind Afro Latin jazz is not news. What sounds fresh in Mr. O'Farrill's version is the breadth of geography it may now embrace. Arará tradition is ancient, yet Mr. Terry expresses it in novel and urgent ways. Both recordings can change anyone's landscape.

Mr. Blumenfeld writes about jazz for the Journal. He also blogs at www.blogs.artinfo.com/bluenotes.

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CD/LP/Track Review

The Offense Of The Drum

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Arturo O'Farrill & The Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra: The Offense Of The Drum (2014)

By **DAN BILAWSKY**, Published: May 28, 2014 | 2,649 views

The Offense Of The Drum may be the least cohesive record in Arturo O'Farrill's discography, but that's largely by design. Here, O'Farrill firmly adheres to his stated "artistic vision"—"to bend what the world knows as Afro Latin jazz over the acoustic horizon"—better than anywhere else in his discography. Guests galore and a belief in Afro Latin camaraderie help him realize that goal, resulting in the most intriguing and expansive offering that he's ever released.



In some ways this album is simply a documentation of O'Farrill's work at New York's Symphony Space. It was there that he broke new ground with pianist [Vijay Iyer](#), DJ Logic, Colombian harpist [Edmar Castaneda](#), spoken word artist Christopher "Chilo" Cajigas, saxophonist [Donald Harrison](#), and percussionist [Samuel Torres](#). The relationship between each of those artists and O'Farrill's Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra is spotlighted on this album. "Cuarto De Colores"—the title track of Castaneda's debut album—is fleshed out to good effect, thanks in large part to the pen of Torres; DJ Logic and the band lay the groundwork for Cajigas' Puerto Rican pride preaching on "They Came"; Iyer simultaneously toys with the concepts of stasis and development on his ode to O'Farrill—"The Mad Hatter"; and a straight line is drawn from NOLA to Cuba when Harrison shows up for "Iko Iko." Each of those pieces stand apart from the others in many respects, yet they stand in solidarity as firm examples of the evolving definition of Afro Latin jazz.

Some of the other numbers walk a relatively straight path from start to finish; "Alma Vacía," a sizzling salsa number from Miguel Blanco, and "Mercado En Domingo," a modern twist on Colombian *porro* music, both fall into this category. The most eye-opening works, however, are more collage-like in nature. "On The Corner Of Malecon And Bourbon," with its start-and-stop look at soloists and follow-the-lines-of-history stylistic transformation(s), and the title track, with a mushrooming fugue-ish introduction, shifting tides and percussion breaks, prove to be the most ambitious offerings.

O'Farrill has never been content to simply accept any stylistic definition in a neat little box. He understands that history and imagination, working hand in hand, can have a limitless partnership. This album goes a long way in proving that point. It's a work of visionary brilliance.

Track Listing: Cuarto De Colores; They Came; On The Corner Of Malecon And Bourbon; Mercado En Domingo; Gnosienne 3 (Tientos); The Mad Hatter; The Offense Of The Drum; Alma Vacía; Iko Iko.

Personnel: Arturo O'Farrill: piano; Ivan Renta: tenor saxophone; Peter Brainin: tenor saxophone; Bobby Porcelli: alto saxophone; David DeJesus:alto saxophone; Jason Marshall: baritone saxophone; Seneca Black: trumpet; Jim Seeley: trumpet; John Bailey: trumpet; Jonathan Powell: trumpet; Tokunori Kajiwara: trombone; Rafi Malkiel: trombone, euphonium; Frank Cohen: trombone; Earl McIntyre: bass trombone, tuba; Gregg August: bass; Vince Cherico: drums; Roland Guerrero: congas; Joe Gonzalez: bongos, bell; Pablo O Bilbraut: percussion (8); Miguel Blanco: conductor (5, 8); Christopher "Chilo" Cajigas: spoken word (2); Edmar Castaneda: harp (1); Ayanda Clarke: djembe (7); DJ Logic: turntables (2); Jonathan Gomez: percussion (4); Nestor Gomez: percussion (4); Donald Harrison: vocals (9), alto saxophone (9); Vijay Iyer: piano (6); Hiro Kurashima: taiko drum (7); Chad Lefkowitz-Brown: tenor saxophone (7); Jason Lindner: conductor (2); Antonio Lizana: vocals (5), alto saxophone (5); Pablo Mayor: conductor (4), maracas: (4); Uri Sharlin: accordion (5); Samuel Torres: conductor (1), cajon (1).

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Music

MAY 2, 2014



On his new album, Arturo O'Farrill and his guests explore the elemental purpose of drumming. Credit Rebecca Meek

Arturo O'Farrill & the Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra

THE OFFENSE OF THE DRUM

The grand, voracious sweep of Latin jazz continues to be a potent cause for the pianist and composer Arturo O'Farrill, whose Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra will release its new album, [“The Offense of the Drum,”](#) on Motéma on Tuesday. The album revolves around the elemental purpose of drumming, with guests including Samuel Torres on cajón and Hiro Kurashima on taiko drums; even some of the more melodic interlopers, like the harpist Edmar Castañeda and the pianist Vijay Iyer, serve a percussive function. (It's instructive to hear how convincingly [“The Mad Hatter,”](#) composed by Mr. Iyer, melds his sensibility with that of the band.) The album's title track, by Mr. O'Farrill, is a comment on police policy on drum circles in New York City, parlayed into a billowing expressionism rather than any sort of tirade. The orchestra will perform this piece, along with the premiere of Mr. O'Farrill's history-minded “Afro Latin Jazz Suite,” at the Apollo Theater on Saturday.