

Juan de Marcos: Skopje, Macedonia, June 1, 2012 (*All About Jazz*)

By NENAD GEORGIEVSKI AUGUST 5, 2012

"It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing." That old line may not mean anything these days but it still vibrates with truth for singer Juan de Marcos and his Afro-Cuban All Stars, whose explosive cocktail of Cuban music is so full of it. In the band's two-hour set as part of the OFFest, the Afro-Cuban All Stars had a diverse agenda. One was surely to win over the crowd with dazzling musicianship and charm. The group brought its vibrant show to Skopje's Universal Hall and wowed the crowd in the process. The band entered in stages, including three brass players, piano, a few percussionists and three singers, fronted and guided by maestro Juan de Marcos. De Marcos is one of the leading figures of Cuban music, best known as the instigator of the Buena Vista Social Club phenomenon and the renewed global interest in this music.

De Marcos and the band skipped onstage full of energy and communicative intent. From there, it was an intoxicating blend of Cuban music, funk, soul and jazz that either strove to sweetly seduce or demand that feet were moved and arms raised high. The band began the set with songs such as "Addimu a Oshun," "Barbaridad," "Camino de Santiago," and the enthusiastic audience greeted them like old friends. The impact was instantly electric. From the opening few bars it was clear the band was going to be exceptionally tight but loose. Visually, it was the imposing presence of the resplendently tall de Marcos, in his white suit, which caught the eye. He is not only an effective singer but a consummate actor who coordinates body movements with facial expressions and gestures in the manner of singer Cab Calloway. His joy and love of the music was infectious, as he did not stop grooving and smiling the entire time he was onstage.

De Marcos and the Afrocubans are masters of dynamics. Cuban music is just plain fun to watch and listen, and almost irresistible to dance to. Here, each song triggered a new burst of dancing with every change thus transporting the audience, mentally, to a happier place.. There was a dynamic balance between the audience and the band with the natural high, give-and-take of energy. The bandleader gave the players a chance to shine, too, with solo spots on their respected instruments. There was real joy to be found in watching a band on stage that didn't sound like 12 musicians all vying for a space in the mix. The set list also included "Lagrimas Negras," the tender "Dos Gardenias," the humorous "Candela," and "Chan Chan," tracks that are known from the *Buena Vista Social Club* (Nonesuch, 1997) album, and which were delivered here with powerful impact.

After two hours filled with the dynamic and potent musical cocktail that is Cuban music, the audience stubbornly did not want to leave. After several encores, the night eventually ended with "Dundumbanza" (according to de Marcos, it was the song and album which success eventually started the Afrocuban and Buena Vista Social Club bands) and "El Son de Baloy." As a result, the performers' dedication and energy onstage received a resounding standing ovation at the end of the night.

Source: <http://www.afrocubanallstarsonline.com/eng/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/All-about-Jazz.pdf>