



Press Kit

Omar Sosa is a musician extraordinaire composer, arranger, pianist, percussionist, improvisatore, communicator. His Afro-Cuban based mix of jazz and world music is broadly expressive - full of power and passion, subtlety and grace. Omar draws from each culture he touches the energy and storytelling of hip-hop, the free-spirited experimentation of jazz, the heartfelt emotion of an Afro-Ecuadorian choir, the sensuality of popular Cuban music, the hypnotic trance of Gnawa ritual. The result is a modern, urban music with a Latin jazz heart.

Born and raised in Camaguey, Cuba, Omar Sosa studied percussion for many years at the prestigious Escuela Nacional de Musica in Havana. When he couldn't find his first-choice instrument the marimba he began to focus on the piano, finishing his formal studies in 1984 at the Instituto Superior de Arte, also in Havana. In the late '80's, having studied everything from Afro-Cuban folkloric traditions to European classical music, he began working with two Cuban pop singers - first Vicente Feliu, then Xiomara Laugart and helped jump-start a Cuban hip-hop scene in the early '90's through his collaboration with Cuban rapper Ofill.

Moving to Quito, Ecuador for several years beginning in 1993, Sosa discovered the folkloric music of Esmeraldas, a pocket of African-rooted culture on the northwest coast of that country known especially for its use of the marimba. In addition to launching his own jazz fusion ensemble, Entrenoz, Sosa produced *Andarele*, a recording by the Afro-Ecuadorian group Koral y Esmeralda.

After a brief stint in Palma Mallorca, Spain, Omar moved to the San Francisco Bay Area in late 1995 where he quickly invigorated the local Latin jazz scene with his explosive playing and adventurous writing. The next year Sosa made his U.S. recording debut on Ota Records with *Omar Omar*, followed in 1997 with the first in a trilogy of groundbreaking World-Jazz recordings: *Free Roots*, *Spirit Of The Roots* (1998) and *Bembon* (2000).

In 1998 Omar began his collaboration with noted Bay Area percussionist and educator John Santos. The duo released a live recording, *Nfumbe*, in conjunction with their appearance at the San Francisco Jazz Festival that year. The following year, revealing more of the contemplative side of his musical sensibilities, Omar released his second solo piano recording, *Inside*, a Top 20-selling CD in France for distributor Night & Day. Capping an extraordinarily productive period, Omar also traveled to Ecuador in 1999 to record his critically acclaimed large-ensemble CD, *Bembon*.



With *Prietos* (2001) and *Sentir* (2002), Omar stretches his genre-expanding fusion still further with the use of traditional vocals and instruments from the Gnawa culture of North Africa. We find tongues in Arabic, English, Portuguese, Spanish and Yoruba, as well as instruments like the guembri, oud, djembe, balafon, and marimba. These recordings are World Music in its truest sense: strong, uncompromising sounds, yet always welcoming and honest. Throughout we hear Omar's genius as an arranger and his extraordinary inspiration at the piano.

In 1999 Omar relocated from Oakland, California to Barcelona, Spain, his point of departure for over 150 international concert and festival appearances annually.

"Cuban pianist Omar Sosa has earned a reputation as a kinetic performer from his beginnings in Cuba to his first foreign residence in Ecuador, later in the San Francisco Bay Area, and now in Paris and his new home, Barcelona. His latest CD, 'Sentir', is a truly groundbreaking recording that manages to fuse Afro-Cuban folklore with jazz attitude and hip-hop overlay. A profound conception that is brilliantly constructed, 'Sentir' is the soulful expression of a spiritual and talented musician who has successfully synthesized a variety of complex musical traditions into an utterly unique experience."

-Robert Leaver, THE BEAT, April, 2002

"Globalization might be an abstract concept for many, but for pianist, composer and arranger Omar Sosa it's a very real, personal matter. Born in Camaguey, Cuba, Sosa toured and recorded, early in his career, in places such as Angola, Congo, Ethiopia, Spain and Mexico. He has lived and worked in Quito, Ecuador, and San Francisco, California, and now has settled in Barcelona, Spain. Not surprisingly, his music is an exploration of African culture with a global perspective. In Sosa's pan-African/pan-Latin approach, Orisha music, hip-hop, rumba, Ecuadorian chants, jazz, and Gnawa ritual music are just different expressions of the same culture. In his music, concepts, instruments, grooves and textures from disparate traditions overlap, blend and collide with deceptive ease. The results are both fresh and illuminating."

-Fernando Gonzalez, DOWN BEAT, May 2002

PreSSKit

Omar Sosa



"Sosa is a versatile pianist with a big sound, especially strong in the extreme registers, and his fast fingers dig into montunos and Herbie Hancock jazz chords."

-Ben Ratliff, THE NEW YORK TIMES, February 15, 2002

"Sosa's performance was an extraordinary example of state-of-the-art world jazz, splendidly illustrating how entrancing the music can become when it is open and receptive to global input and interaction."

-Don Heckman, LOS ANGELES TIMES, April 18, 2002

"Although Cuba has produced more than its share of leonine jazz pianists, Sosa stands out among them, and not only because of the crystalline beauty of his touch and the nimbleness of his technique. A deeply spiritual player, Sosa more often than not puts his virtuosity aside to play the simplest, single-note melody or to linger over a radiant, chorale-like series of harmonies."

-Howard Reich, CHICAGO TRIBUNE, March 11, 2002

"A new phase in the jazz and Cuban music linkage is being unveiled by gifted pianist Omar Sosa. Previous blendings of the two genres have tended to emphasize the powerful energies of Afro-Cuban rhythms in combination with the harmonic structures and improvisational qualities of jazz. Sosa, however, has moved beyond the parallelism of musical elements into a kind of natural, organic expressiveness in which the musics' separate identities are replaced by a seamless, creative mutuality."

- Don Heckman, LOS ANGELES TIMES, January 19, 2003

"Omar Sosa has all the traits necessary to become one of the important figures in jazz."

-Don Heckman, LOS ANGELES TIMES, January 19, 2003



"Sosa is one of the truly illuminated minds of world jazz."

-Philip Van Vleck, BILLBOARD, March 23, 2002

"At the core of Sosa's music, there's the impulse to connect disparate sources, to explore old links, to make an ancient culture whole again by pushing it forward."

-Fernando Gonzalez, THE WASHINGTON POST, March 13, 2002

"Sosa is shaping a new synthesis of Latin and American jazz."

-Philip Van Vleck, BILLBOARD, February 22, 2003

"Omar Sosa is a fusion artist in the best sense of the word. The virtuosic pianist mixes his Cuban roots with tastes of bebop, free jazz, even hip-hop and electronica, into a strikingly fresh and spicy modern stew that's much more than the sum of its ingredients."

Joel Roberts, ALLABOUTJAZZ, April 2003

"Sosa moves from delicate, unabashedly romantic melodies to wild blasts of percussive noise in a manner that recalls the best of Keith Jarrett."

-Joel Roberts, ALLABOUTJAZZ, April 2003



PreSSKit
www.omarsosa.com

Otá Records
484 Lake Park Avenue,
Suite 32 Oakland,
CA 94610 U.S.A.
510-339-3389 phone
510-339-0389 fax
music@melodia.com
www.melodia.com