

Gato Barbieri & Lonnie Liston Smith – Bolivia (1973)

Written by bluesever

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A1 Merceditas 9:07 A2 Eclipse/Michellina 6:24 B1 Bolivia 7:46 B2 Ninos 7:15 B3 Vidala Triste 5:33 Gato Barbieri - Tenor Saxophone, Flute, Vocals Lonnie Liston Smith - Piano, Electric Piano [Rhodes] John Abercrombie – Guitar J.-F. Jenny-Clark, Stanley Clarke – Bass Pretty Purdie – Drums Airto Moreira, Gene Golden (2), James M'tume, Moulay "Ali" Hafid – Percussion

In 1973, Argentinean saxophonist Gato Barbieri contemplated a move to a more commercially viable, accessible sound, one that appealed to both North and South American audiences. He moved from the jazz vanguard toward its exotic center (and finally into the commercial world altogether) with a number of records, including this one, which explored the various rhythms, melodies, and textures of Afro-Cuban and Latin American sounds. *Bolivia* features Barbieri immediately prior to his Impulse recordings that resulted in the celebrated four-chapter Latin America series. Utilizing the talents of musicians as diverse as guitarist John Abercrombie, pianist Lonnie Liston Smith, drummer and percussionists Airto Moreira, M'tume, Bernard "Pretty" Purdie, Gene Golden, and Moulay Ali Hafid, as well as bassists Stanley and J.F. Jenny Clark. Barbieri's musical reach is everywhere here. There's the bolero-like romp of "Merceditas," where his normally raw-toned, feeling-centered playing is kicked up a couple notches into a frenetic, emotional tidal wave, and the haunting "Bolivia," full of shimmering percussion and pianistic glissandi courtesy of Smith. Barbieri's loping, spare playing is reminiscent of Coltrane stating of the melodic frames in "India." There is also the melody of the traditional "Eclipse" wedded to a gorgeous, sensual Cuban son-like melody "Michellina" (for Barbieri's Italian born wife). The final two of the album's five tracks are based in Argentinean folk forms associated with the tango, but are less formal, more open, and modally charged. Setting both "Ninos" and "Vidala Triste" in minor keys with open modal themes, improvisation happens -- à la Ornette Coleman -- in the heart of the melody, despite the intricate nature and complex time and key changes inherent in both tunes. Ultimately, *Bolivia* is a sensual, musically adept, and groundbreaking recording, which offered Barbieri a chance to come in from the avant-garde before heading back to the fringes with the Latin America series. A fine effort that is finally getting the notoriety it deserves. ---Thom Jurek, Rovi

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