

Afro Cuban All Stars - A Toda Cuba Le Gusta (1997)

Written by bluelover

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01- Amor Verdadero 02- Alto Songo 03- Habana del Este 04- A Toda Cuba le Gusta 05- Fiesta de la Rumba 06- Los Sitio' Asere 07- Pio Mentiroso 08- Maria Caracoles 09- Clasiqeuando con Ruben 10- Elube Chango Afro-Cuban All Stars: Pio Leyva, Raul Planas, Felix Valoy, Jose Antonio "Maceo" Rodriguez, Manuel "Puntillita" Licea, Ibrahim Ferrer (vocals); Juan De Marcos Gonzalez (tres, background vocals); Javier Zalba (baritone sax, flute); Luis Alemany, Manuel "Guajiro" Mirabal, Daniel Ramos (trumpet); Carlos "El Afrokan" Alvarez, Demetrio Muniz (trombone); Ruben Gonzalez (piano); Orlando "Cachaito" Lopez (bass); Alberto Virigilio Valdes (maracas, background vocals); Julienne Oviedo (timbales); Miguel "Anga" (congas); Carlos Gonzalez (bongos); Carlos Puisseaux (guiro); Luis Barzaga (background vocals) + Ry Cooder (slide guitar); Barbarito Torres (laoud); Richard Egues (flute).

A lively, spontaneous record that manages to sound both relaxed and forceful at the same time, *A Toda Cuba Le Gusta* shows off the talents of many of Cuba's elder statesmen of Afro-Cuban jazz. Over gently pulsating conga grooves and low-register ostinatos, such luminaries as pianist Ruben Gonzalez and singer Manuel "Puntillita" Licea float dramatic melodies, as their solo contributions are answered by brass section chords as thick and sweet as cane syrup. Although it is Ruben Gonzalez' presence on this album that gets the most attention, his tendency towards relentless chromaticism becomes tiresome early on, especially when it is contrasted with the exquisite phrasing and tremulous beauty of singers such as Licea, Raul Planas, and Ibrahim Ferrer. As would be expected, the trumpets blare with traditional Cuban bravado, evoking gentle romance and fiery passion with equal ease. Even the resident gringo, Ry Cooder, gets in some choice licks on "Alto Songo." The relative lack of dynamic movement in most of these songs may lead to them blending together in the ear of the listener, but the inherent tunefulness of each track, not to mention the sheer drive that this band is capable of summoning, cancels that complaint out nicely. An important collaboration and a promising debut. --- Daniel Gioffre, Rovi

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