

Francisco Aguabella – Ochimini (2004)

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1. Ochimini [05:41] 2. Funky Cha [04:52] 3. Love For Sale [07:06] [play](#) 4. Nuestra Erra [04:42] 5. OBA [07:17] 6. Tumbaito [05:34] 7. Guajira Candela [06:07] 8. Makin' Whoopee [04:40] [play](#) 9. Te Olvide [05:29]

Personnel: Francisco Aguabella (congas, percussion); Justo Almario (tenor and alto sax); Sal Cracchiolo (trumpet); Jules Powell (trombone); Poncho Sanchez (congas); Francisco Torres (trombone); Jules Rowell (trombone); Donald Vega (piano); Alfredo Ortiz (percussion); Luis Eric Gonzalez (trumpet); John Belzaguy (bass); Jimmy Branly (drums); Conra Coky Garsia (drums).

Aguabella has worn the mantle of Afro-Cuban percussion royalty for about half a century since he arrived in New York City from Matanzas, Cuba, in the late 1950s. Among the first generation of Afro-Cuban percussionists who emigrated to the States, his legend stands from his work inside and outside Latin jazz spheres: He has worked with Tjader and Machito and Eddie Palmieri, and with Carlos Santana; he's worked with Gillespie and Nancy Wilson, with Weather Report, and Frank Sinatra, too. Aguabella composed the opening title track and peppers it with his congas, but blazing trumpet solos by Eric Gonzales, Conra Coky Garsia's timbales, and trombone player Francisco Torres' arrangement help build the ensemble's power, precision, and polish, too. "Funky Cha" presents the nice change of pace of cool Monterrey funk, laid back as a California beach, with a straight-up, in-the-pocket jazz turn from tenor saxophonist Justo Almario.

Ochimini returns to the spirit of classic big band dance bands of mid-century Cuba not only by using trombone, saxophone, and trumpet—especially Gonzales' trumpet—for its solo voices, but also by featuring two pop standards in its repertoire. The sound of Cuban jazz orchestra dancehalls resounds through decades in "Makin' Whoopie," as Gonzales' trumpet melody statement echoes like a cornet from that bygone era and Francisco Torres plays trombone soft and supple as a fine tenor ballad wrapped in kid leather gloves. "Love For Sale" is aggressively

timed, with Aguabella's congas and Garsia's drums doubling down and pounding the downbeat. Bass (John Belzaguy), piano (Donald Vega), and percussion then congregate in a mid-song breakdown that's more like a beatdown! This starts out as the Cole Porter classic but ends up a smoking Afro-Cuban jam.

"Guijira Candela," with its tribal sound and spirit and uncut Afro-Cuban rhythm, cooks the hottest. Piano paints bold brushstrokes in blue and red and purple, cowbell clangs out whole beats so simple yet dead on, the horn section writhes like a lithe senorita, and amidst it all, Aguabella chugs and pops and clangs and bongs half-smiling, half-lost in ecstasy like the Buddha. The end of this "Guajira" is joyously danceable. The set ends with "Te Olvide," more swivel-hipped Afro-Cuban descarga with plenty of room in the middle for Aguabella's percussion battery, cowbells and congas. I may never know the English translation of these lyrics. But they sure sound and feels warm and friendly, like "Hey, we had fun playing for you. We hope you had fun too. Come back and dance with us again sometime!" ---Chris M. Slaweki, allaboutjazz.com

Nearly 50 years after emigrating to the United States from his native Cuba, conguero and percussionist Francisco Aguabella is still capable of organizing and leading some of the most dynamic ensembles in Latin jazz and Afro-Cuban music, as his fifth album for the Cubop label demonstrates.

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