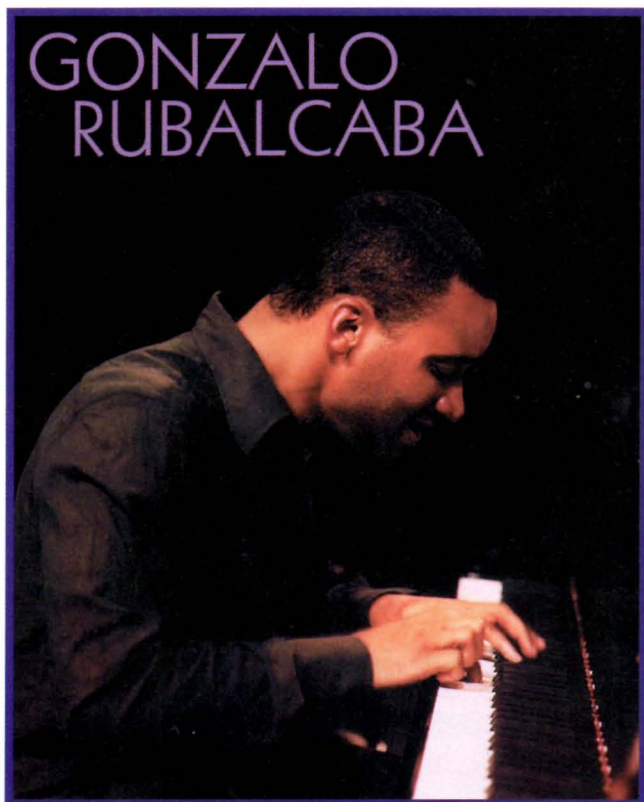


# backstage *with*...

**Gonzalo Rubalcaba's** virtuosity, coupled with a ferocious intensity, has driven his remarkable music career, during which he's pursued thoughtful, intriguing explorations of the Latin jazz continuum. His albums and live performances draw from bebop, traditional Cuban music and his extensive classical training.



Rubalcaba's four "Invitation Series" performances at the 23rd edition of the Montreal International Jazz Festival amounted to a homecoming of sorts: He made his North American debut at the festival in 1988, with his own Grupo Projecto, and in 1989 he performed with Charlie Haden at the bassist's own "Invitation" concerts (captured on Haden's *Montreal Tapes* albums).

Cuba-born Rubalcaba, based in South Florida since 1996, spoke with *Down Beat* at the historic, ornate Monument National in Montreal, the site of the pianist's four-night late June festival stand.

## **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO YOU TO HOST THE "INVITATION SERIES?"**

It's a big challenge. It's difficult every night to show people different formats and a different musical language. But this has been great, because at the same time you have the opportunity to play with people who maybe you haven't played with in a long time. So it's a different moment—you see what they're doing, you can bring your new experience. The result has been fresh.

I remember when Joe Lovano and I did *Flying Colors* in '97.

The last time that we did that music was two-and-a-half years ago, and now we're here in Montreal with a lot of new things, with a lot of new material, new energy and a new vibe. But that's beautiful because it's not only what you can give, it's also what you can learn from the other guys.

## **WAS THERE A PARTICULAR KIND OF PORTRAIT OF YOU AS A MUSICIAN THAT YOU WANTED TO PRESENT OVER THE COURSE OF THESE FOUR EVENINGS?**

The first day was the *Inner Voyage* music in trio with Carlos [Henriquez] and Ignacio [Berroa], which was very quiet music in general. Then came Joe Lovano: Playing duet with Joe was another musical dimension. It was more abstract, more avant-garde. We had to think about how to play, how to sound as an ensemble, a big ensemble with just two people using the whole range of the instruments—the piano, saxophones, percussion, Joe was using gongs and drums. Every time that we play together is like [trying to] recompose the piece.

Yesterday with Charlie and David [Sanchez], that was the mellow, romantic part of the series. We played part of the *Nocturne* album. We also tried to play standards that not many people play all the time—"Nefertiti," "Monk's Mood," some of Charlie's tunes and some boleros from Mexico without drums or percussion. That was the challenge to be there, together, all the time.

And tonight is more of a—I don't know how to call it—Latin or Afro-Cuban ensemble with a lot of jazz chords. Basically, it's original compositions. Over four days people can see different portraits of me, a different frame every night with different energy and attitude. We're looking for art, beauty and different themes, structures and harmonies.

## **CHARLIE HADEN HAS BEEN A REAL MENTOR FOR YOU, IN TERMS OF BRINGING YOU ALONG AND INTRODUCING YOU TO AUDIENCES. TELL ME ABOUT THE MUSICAL CHEMISTRY BETWEEN YOU AND CHARLIE.**

Most important to me is Charlie's attitude. He's always very open and in total disposition to go somewhere, anywhere, especially with Cuban music or music from South America, Latin America. He's always listening to musicians from Cuba, Brazil and Argentina. That makes our relationship very easy, because I learn from his culture and he learns with us about our culture. That has been the great bridge.

## **HAVE YOU STARTED TO WORK ON YOUR NEXT RECORD?**

We are working on it, and thinking about bringing people into the studio like Joe Lovano.

## **SO IT WILL BE YOUR TRIO WITH JOE?**

And Dianne Reeves and Cassandra Wilson. We'll see. I'm still thinking about the concept of the record. We're supposed to record in September.

**DB**

by philip booth