

BRAITHWAITE & KATZ

Communications

NEWS RELEASE

Contact: Ann Braithwaite
(781) 259-9600
Ann@bkmusicpr.com

Pianist/Composer Oscar Perez Introduces the Latest Wave in Post-Latin Jazz On New CD *Afropean Affair* Available October 11

"This is a musician that has his own voice. Both his compositions and his improvisations are evidence of this." — Dan Miele, Jazz Improv Magazine

"The pianist's writing and arranging is smart, tradition inspired Latin jazz with an emphasis on jazz chords and colours. It's an addictive, sultry sound, rich with concise improvisations that always tell a wise tale and tell it well." — Joseph Blake, The Times Colonist

The widespread outrage spawned by the Recording Academy's decision to do away with the Grammy Award for Best Latin Jazz Album has obscured a far more interesting development. A new generation of musicians is busy erasing the old distinctions between straight ahead and Latin jazz, forging thrilling new group concepts by blending Afro-Caribbean rhythms and postbop idioms. With his second album, *Afropean Affair*, pianist/ composer **Oscar Perez** places himself firmly in the forefront of this rising movement. The CD will be released on October 11.

Featuring Perez's stellar young band Nuevo Comienzo, *Afropean Affair* focuses on the pianist's original music, which he designed to showcase his group's improvisational prowess and conservatory-honed facility for interpreting extended compositions. Balancing poise and power, the combo features some of the most prodigious young players on the scene, including the commanding saxophonist **Stacy Dillard** on tenor and soprano, silver-toned **Greg Glassman** on trumpet and flugelhorn, resourceful percussionist **Emiliano Valerio**, deeply funky drummer **Jerome Jennings** and harmonically deft bassist **Anthony Perez** (who also happens to be Oscar's younger brother).

"I grew up listening to my father's albums of traditional Cuban music," says Perez, 36. "But we're American jazz musicians and we're not trying to be anything else. The concept I'm going for filters everything through the writing. In picking the members of the band, they needed to have their own sounds. Jerome is a drummer who just loves to groove. He's not playing straight Cuban rhythms. He's always mixing it up, which is true for all of us."

From the brisk, mercurial opening tune "The Illusive Number," which bobs and weaves through various time signatures, to the gorgeously flowing melodic line running through "Paths and Streams," which has all the makings of a jazz standard, Perez displays a real gift for crafting memorable tunes. Adding to the band's singular sound is Perez's acute textural sensibility, seen in his artful use of the Fender Rhodes.

The album's centerpiece is the texturally expansive three-piece *Afropean Suite*, a work commissioned by Chamber Music America that Perez premiered at the Jazz Gallery in September 2009. With the addition of the soul-drenched vocalist **Charenee Wade**, who contributes beautifully calibrated wordless lines, the suite traces an evocative emotional arc that flows from the soaring, sanguine first movement, "Cosas Lindas Que Viven Ahora" (Pretty Things That Live Now) to the nostalgia-laced "Last Seasons Sorrows" to the beatific closer "A New Day Emerging."

"My writing gets influenced by everything I listen to," Perez says. "In the new stuff I hear a lot of Chick. We've become a lot more adventurous the more we're not thinking about being a traditional Afro-Cuban band. We're looking at that early Return To Forever model, not so much drawing on Brazilian influences as playing on the edge, with that quiet intensity. We try to get as tight as possible, but I don't want it to be super-tight so it can go anywhere we want."

As the album's title suggests, Perez sees his music as a cultural confluence where Europe, Africa, America and the Caribbean flow seamlessly together. Not surprisingly, he traces his group concept back to his studies with Danilo Perez, the brilliant Panamanian pianist who is ground zero for what can be called post-Latin jazz, with a roster of students that includes trailblazing artists such as Puerto Rican tenor saxophonist David Sanchez and altoist Miguel Zenon, Peruvian bassist Jorge Roeder, Colombian percussionist Tupac Mantilla, Argentine vocalist Sofia Rei Koutsovitis, among many others.

- over -

Born in a middle class neighborhood in Queens, Perez grew up immersed in Latin American music. His Cuban father fled the island in 1966, though he decided to strike out on his own in New York City rather than joining the exile community in Miami. His mother was born and raised in Colombia, and brought her love of Latin music to New York. A dedicated violinist while attending the LaGuardia High School for the Performing Arts (the school made famous by "Fame"), he also studied piano with two illustrious classical pianists, Julliard's Robert Harris and NYU's Edgar Roberts. On his own time he played guitar in various garage rock bands, while his guitar teacher Tony Romano turned him on to Jim Hall via the classic Sonny Rollins album *The Bridge*.

When he arrived at the University of North Florida's vaunted Jazz Performance program Perez made the jump back to piano, transferring his newfound jazz insight from the fretboard to the keyboard. Before long he had developed enough facility to hold his own with jazz masters such as Bunky Green, George Russell, Curtis Fuller and George Garzone. But his most profound epiphany took place his senior year, when he caught a performance by Danilo Perez in Chicago with bassist Avishai Cohen and drummer Jeff "Tain" Watts. That's how he ended up at New England Conservatory in Boston.

"I wasn't even planning on going to grad school," Perez recalls. "But Danilo made such an impact I told my friends, I'm going to study with that guy. I think the reason so many people get traced back to him is that he truly loves all his students. Even now when I go hear him play I'll still get a lesson from him. People just connect through him. He has one foot firmly set in education, but he's an ambassador of the music."

While completing his MFA at the Aaron Copland School of Music at Queens College under the guidance of piano legend Sir Roland Hanna, Perez studied composition and arranging with Phillip Michael Mossman. A highly sought after sideman, he's performed and toured widely with trombonist Wycliffe Gordon, saxophonist Virginia Mayhew, trombonist Steve Turre, and vocalists Charenee Wade and Cathy Elliott. He also spent three years accompanying the late, Grammy Award-winning singer/songwriter Phoebe Snow.

After many years performing at St. Edward's Church in Harlem, Perez was recently appointed music director for the congregation. His long-standing gig as accompanist for the Nightingale/Bamford Gospel Choir embodies his commitment to sacred music. And Perez has found several paths to explore his passion for education, including teaching privately, offering master classes through Jazz at Lincoln Center, and teaching at vocalist Melissa Walker's community program Jazz House Kids, which brings music to underserved children and adults in Newark.

But his most fully realized creative outlet is Nuevo Comienzo. Perez traces the band's origins to an opportunity that arose in 2003, when he was hired to assemble a group for a tour of cities in Russia's far east. He had been working with Stacy Dillard in various bands around New York, and had developed a close musical connection with Greg Glassman in college. Taking full advantage of the opportunity, he wrote a sheaf of new music for the ensemble, and had it well rehearsed before heading out on tour.

Upon returning to New York, Perez figured the time was ripe to document that band. Since he'd been working with Wycliffe Gordon and Peter Bernstein he invited them to join the session as special guests, which resulted in his heralded 2005 debut recording *Nuevo Comienzo*.

"We played six concerts in Siberia in these beautiful concert halls," Perez recalls. "We had write ups in magazines, and really got the star treatment. Three weeks before, I'm playing weddings and schlepping my stuff on the subway. That's the jazz life."

www.oscarperezmusic.com

#