

## **AQUAS**

Pianist Omar Sosa and violinist-vocalist Yilian Cañizares have come together to create *Aguas*, a beautiful and very personal album. Featuring their compatriot, percussionist Inor Sotolongo, *Aguas* reflects the perspectives of two generations of Cuban artists living outside their homeland, interpreting their roots and traditions in subtle and unique ways. Songs range from the poignant to the exuberant, and are expressive of the exceptional musical chemistry, poetic sensibilities, and originality of the artists.

The material on *Aguas* is an inventive and engaging mix of the artists' Afro-Cuban roots, Western classical music, and jazz. The album is dedicated to Water, and especially to Oshun, the Goddess of Love and Mistress of Rivers in the Lucumí tradition of Yoruba ancestry known in Cuba as Santería – a spiritual practice important to both artists.

As water is synonymous with life, and energy, and strength, and space, the music of the album is inspired by the important influences of water – its hidden powers, its infinite transmutations, and its relentless creation. There is a sense, as well, for Omar and Yilian, of how water represents both separation from, and nostalgia for, the land of their birth.

The 11 tracks on *Aguas* were written and produced by Omar and Yilian, and recorded and mixed at Artesuono Studios in Udine, Italy by Stefano Amerio.

## **OMAR SOSA**

Composer-pianist-bandleader Omar Sosa was born in 1965 in Camagüey, Cuba's largest inland city. At age eight, Omar began studying percussion and marimba at the music conservatory in Camagüey; in Havana, as a teenager, he took up piano at the prestigious Escuela Nacional de Música, and completed his formal education at the Instituto Superior de Arte in Havana. Among his influences, Omar cites traditional Afro-Cuban music, European classical composers (including Chopin, Bartok, and Satie), Monk, Coltrane, Parker, Oscar Peterson, Herbie Hancock, Chick Corea, Keith Jarrett, Chucho Valdés, and the pioneering Cuban jazz group Irakere. Moving in 1993 to Ecuador, Omar immersed himself in the folkloric traditions of Esmeraldas, the northwest coast region whose African heritage includes the distinctive marimba tradition. He relocated to the San Francisco Bay Area in 1995, and soon invigorated the Latin jazz scene with his adventurous writing and percussive style.

Annually performing upwards of 100 concerts on six continents, Omar has appeared in venues as diverse as the Blue Note (New York, Milan, and Tokyo), Carnegie Hall's Zankel Hall, Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Arts, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Walker Art Center, the

Getty Center, London's Barbican and Queen Elizabeth Hall, Glasgow's Royal Concert Hall, and Berlin's Haus der Kulturen der Welt; festivals including Monterey Jazz, JVC Jazz, Montreal Jazz, Marciac Jazz, North Sea Jazz, Helsinki, Grenoble Jazz, Montreux Jazz, Naples Jazz, Ravenna Jazz, Roma Jazz, Spoleto, WOMAD, and Cape Town International Jazz; and universities on several continents, including a visiting artist fellowship at Princeton University in March 2008, and a visiting artist residency at Dartmouth College in April 2008. Omar will return to Dartmouth College for a second artist residency in February 2011.

Mr. Sosa received a lifetime achievement award from the Smithsonian Associates in Washington, DC in 2003 for his contribution to the development of Latin jazz in the United States. He has received two nominations from the BBC Radio 3 World Music Awards, in 2004 and 2006, both in the 'Americas' category. In 2003 Omar Sosa received the Afro-Caribbean Jazz Album of the Year Award from the Jazz Journalists Association in NYC for his recording *Sentir*; and a nomination from the Jazz Journalists Association for Latin Jazz Album of the Year in 2005 for his recording *Mulatos*.

Omar Sosa received an orchestral commission from Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco and the Oakland Easy Bay Symphony, supported by grants from the Rockefeller Foundation and the MAP Fund (Multi-Arts Production Fund). During 2001-2002, Mr. Sosa composed a 45-minute work in three movements for symphony orchestra entitled, *From Our Mother*, which received its world premiere in January 2003 by the Oakland East Bay Symphony under the direction of Michael Morgan. In 2009, Mr. Sosa received an orchestral commission from the city of Girona, Spain and the Festival de Músicas Religiosas y del Mundo de Girona. The 20-minute work for symphony orchestra, entitled *Oda Africana*, received its world premiere in July 2009 by the Jove Orquesta Athenea, conducted by Lluis Caballeria. Also in 2009, Mr. Sosa received a commission from the Barcelona Jazz Festival to present a tribute to Miles Davis' *Kind Of Blue* recording, featuring Afro-Cuban interpretations of the seminal Davis work on the occasion of its 50th anniversary. The project was performed at L'Auditori in Barcelona in November 2009.

In 2008, Omar Sosa received funding from the National Endowment for the Arts in conjunction with Yerba Buena Gardens (San Francisco) and the San Francisco International Arts Festival to present a new Omar Sosa Quintet featuring American roots vocalist Tim Eriksen. This collaboration resulted in the 2009 CD release on Half Note Records, *Across The Divide*, recorded live at the Blue Note Jazz Club in NYC. The project received a GRAMMY nomination for Best Contemporary World Music Album, and a Latin GRAMMY nomination for Best Instrumental Album, both in 2009.

For May 2011, Mr. Sosa has received further funding from the National Endowment for the Arts in conjunction with the Jazz School in Berkeley, California and the San Francisco International Arts Festival, to present a series of workshops with noted Latin jazz percussionist, educator and historian, John Santos, as well as a Festival performance in San Francisco with his primary touring ensemble, Afreecanos Quartet.

Mr. Sosa's recording career began in 1997 with the release of his first solo piano recording, *Omar Omar* on the Oakland, California-based record label, Otá Records, and has continued with the release of 22 CDs as a leader, resulting in five GRAMMY nominations. These include a 2002 GRAMMY nomination and Latin GRAMMY nomination for Best Latin Jazz Album for the CD *Sentir*; a 2005 GRAMMY nomination for Best Latin Jazz Album for the CD *Mulatos*, featuring Cuban saxophone and clarinet master, Paquito D'Rivera; and the two nominations for Across The Divide in 2009.

Omar works with an array of African, Arabic, European, Indian, Latin, and North American musicians. Among his many associations are drummers and percussionists Steve Argüelles, Julio Barretto, Mino Cinelu, Miguel "Angá" Diaz, Marque Gilmore, Trilok Gurtu, Marcos Ilukán, Ramiro Musotto, Gustavo Ovalles, Pancho Quinto, Adam Rudolph, John Santos, Carlos "Patato" Valdés, and Orestes Vilató; singers Tim Eriksen, Lázaro Galarraga, Marta Galarraga, El Houssaine Kili, Xiomara Laugart, María Márquez, Will Power, Mola Sylla, the Tenores San Gavino de Oniferi - Sardinia, and Dhafer Youssef; trumpeter Paolo Fresu; and woodwind masters Paquito D'Rivera, Luis Depestre, Leandro Saint-Hill, and Mark Weinstein.

Another recent work is *Tales From The Earth* (Otá Records, 2009), led by flute player Mark Weinstein. The recording presents a thoroughly cosmopolitan outlook rooted in the rhythmic intensity and improvisatory, call-and-response spirit of Africa writ large. It features artists of

Cuban, Haitian, West African, European, African American, and Jewish American heritage, with a shared commitment to the communal, celebratory character that embodies the expressive riches of Mother Africa and features Omar on marimba and vibraphone, which he studied in Cuba's conservatories before switching to piano.

A major new project bears the fruit of Omar's first big band collaboration, working with composer Jaques Morelenbaum and Hamburg's North German Radio (NDR) Bigband. Recorded in 2007 and 2008 at the NDR studios in Hamburg, it features Jaques Morelenbaum arrangements of material from the Omar Sosa CDs *Spirit Of The Roots* (1999), *Bembón* (2000), and *Afreecanos* (2008). Jaques Morelenbaum has arranged for Antonio Carlos Jobim, Gal Costa, Gilberto Gil, Caetano Veloso, and Cesária Evora, among many others. Omar Sosa-NDR Bigband performances were held at the Banlieues Bleues festival in Paris and the NDR studios in March 2010; and will be presented again by the Barcelona Jazz Festival in November 2010 at that city's famous Palau Música Catalana, with Jaques Morelenbaum conducting.

New performing pursuits include a trio with noted Italian trumpet player Paolo Fresu and master Indian percussionist Trilok Gurtu. Notable video productions include *Light In The Sky*, filmed in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil and directed by Aitor Echeverria (from the 2008 CD release *Afreecanos*), and the recent DVD release of Omar Sosa's 2007 Java Jazz Festival performance in Jakarta, Indonesia.

For film and television, Omar Sosa collaborated in 2008 on the soundtrack for the PBS

documentary, *The Judge and the General*; and completed the soundtrack for the 2010 film *The Last Flight of the Flamingo*, produced by Fado Filmes in Lisbon, Portugal, and based on Mia Couto's famous novel about Mozambique. Mr. Sosa also contributed a musical excerpt to the 2006 Andy Garcia film, *The Lost City*.

In 2011, Omar released his fifth solo piano recording, *Calma*, which received a Latin GRAMMY nomination. Featuring Omar's unique and original approach to the genre, the CD is comprised of 13 solo piano improvisations, fusing stylistic elements of jazz, classical new music, ambient, and electronica.

In January 2012, Omar collaborated with celebrated Italian trumpet and flugelhorn player, Paolo Fresu, on the release of *Alma*. The CD features guest cello contributions on four tracks by the masterful Brazilian conductor, arranger, producer, and cellist, Jaques Morelenbaum. Produced by Paolo Fresu and Omar Sosa for Mr. Fresu's label imprint, Tuk Music, the compositions are written by Omar Sosa and Paolo Fresu, except for *Under African Skies*, a gentle version of the popular track from the Paul Simon CD, *Graceland*.

Omar Sosa's next studio album, "Eggum: The Afri-Lectric Experience", is set for release worldwide in February 2013. Eggum, in the West African spiritual practice of Ifa and its various expressions throughout the African Diaspora, are the spirits of those who have gone before us, both in our personal families and those who serve as our spiritual guides.

The Omar Sosa Afri-Lectric Experience began as a commission from the Barcelona Jazz Festival in 2009. The assignment: to compose and produce a tribute performance to Miles Davis' classic *Kind Of Blue* recording on the occasion of its 50th anniversary. Inspired by various musical elements and motifs from *Kind Of Blue*, Omar wrote a suite of music honoring the spirit of freedom in Davis' seminal work. Featuring trumpet and two saxophones, *Eggum* provides a medium for musical elements from Africa to shape and develop the music, and the resulting jazz textures are further enriched by the subtle and expressive use of electronic elements. At the heart of the recording is the spirit of Mother Africa.

Following the success of the *Kind Of Blue* commission, Omar began to include the new arrangements into the repertoire of his regular touring ensemble, resulting in the creation of the The Afri-Lectric Experience. The featured horn players are Joo Kraus on trumpet (from Germany), Leandro Saint-Hill on saxophones and flute (from Cuba), and Peter Apfelbaum on saxophones and percussion (from U.S.A.). Omar's longtime rhythm section of Marque Gilmore on drums (from U.S.A.) and Childo Tomas on electric bass (from Mozambique) create the foundation.

Special guests on the project include Lionel Loueke on guitars (from Benin), Marvin Sewell on guitars (from U.S.A.), Pedro Martinez on Afro-Cuban percussion (from Cuba), John Santos on percussion (from U.S.A.) and Gustavo Ovalles on Afro-Venezuelan percussion (from Venezuela). The CD was recorded primarily in Brooklyn, NY.

In January 2014, Omar released his 5th solo piano recording, *Senses*. It was created at EMPAC, the Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York. Omar was invited to an artist residency at EMPAC in 2012 by Zimbabwean dancer / choreographer Nora Chipaumire to compose music for Nora's dance-theater piece, *Miriam*. The sound score for *Miriam* received a BESSIE Nomination for a New York Dance and Performance Award for Outstanding Musical Composition / Sound Design.

In March 2015, Omar released a CD with his Quarteto AfroCubano, entitled *Ilé*. This recording marked a homecoming for Omar to his formative years in late '80s and early '90s Havana. *Ilé* means home, or earth, in the Lucumí tradition to his of Cuba, derived from the Yoruba language of West Africa, and it is to the Latin Jazz roots of his native Cuba that Omar returns for inspiration on this new CD.

Joining him on the project are three musicians with whom Omar shares a close connection: fellow Camagüeyanos, Ernesto Simpson on drums, and Leandro Saint-Hill on alto saxophone, flute and clarinet, and Mozambican electric electric bassist Childo Tomas – collectively known as Quarteto AfroCubano. These musicians speak the same musical language, using their Cuban and African traditions as a springboard for creative freedom.

Special guests on the recording include Cuban percussionist Pedro Martinez, American guitarist Marvin Sewell, Cuban saxophonist Yosvany Terry, and maestro Eladio "Don Pancho" Terry, patriarch of the Terry family, on chekere. Featured on vocals is spoken word artist Kokayi. And, reflecting the influence of his extended residency in Barcelona, Omar showcases Flamenco vocalist José "El Salao" Martín on several tracks, including a version of Cuban trova composer Sindo Garay's *La Tarde*.

Upcoming recording projects for Omar Sosa include a unique collaboration with Senegalese kora player Seckou Keita and Chinese sheng player Wu Tong, entitled *Transparent Water*, which was released in February 2017; a second CD production with Italian trumpet player Paolo Fresu, following their 2012 release, *Alma*, featuring Brazilian cellist Jaques Morelenbaum, entitled *Eros*, and set for release in May 2016; and a follow-up CD with the NDR Bigband, featuring arrangements again by Jaques Morelenbaum, entitled *Es:sensual*, was released in Germany in early 2017.

New touring projects for Omar Sosa include JOG Trio, featuring award-winning German trumpet player Joo Kraus, and folkloric Venezuelan percussionist Gustavo Ovalles. Their CD, entitled *JOG*, was released in GAS, Poland, Benelux and Scandinavia in October 2015 by Hamburg-based SKIP Records. A co-leader project with tenor saxophonist Jacques Schwarz-Bart from Guadeloupe, entitled *Creole Spirits*, was launched in April 2016 with a creation residency in Guadeloupe. This gathering resulted in an EPK video produced by noted French filmmaker Frank Cassenti.

Omar's second CD with the NDR Bigband, "*Es:sensual*", was released in the U.S. and Japan, et al, in January 2018, with arrangements again by noted Brazilian master,

Jaques Morelenbaum, and featuring a number of Omar's signature compositions, "Cha Cha du Nord", and "My Three Notes".

In October 2018, **Omar** and violinist-vocalist **Yilian Cañizares** released **Aguas**, a very beautiful and personal album. Featuring their compatriot, percussionist **Inor Sotolongo**, Aguas reflects the perspectives of two generations of Cuban artists living outside their homeland, interpreting their roots and traditions in subtle and unique ways. Songs range from the poignant to the exuberant, and are expressive of the exceptional musical chemistry, poetic sensibilities, and originality of the artists.

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Omar and Yilian will be doing a CD release tour in the Fall of 2018, in Trio with folkloric Venezuelan percussionist Gustavo Ovalles. Highlights include a London Jazz Festival show at the Barbican, an NDR 60th Anniversary concert at Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg, and two nights at Bal Blomet in Paris.

## **YILIAN CAÑIZARES**

*"Yilian is one of the most incredible talents of the new generation of Cuban musicians. She is a virtuoso, she is expressive, spontaneous and with a grace that makes her the favorite of all of us." Chucho Valdés*

Before she picks up her violin and walks onstage, Yilian Cañizares pays homage to her ancestors. Candles are lit. Prayers are said, and offerings made. Then as the houselights dim and her group of crack musicians file on before her, she'll lean down and touch the floor as she enters.

"This always puts me fully in the moment," says the vivacious Cuban singer and instrumentalist. "It allows the music and the ancestors to flow through me, to reach people even if they don't speak my language. I go into a trance when I perform live," she adds with a grin. "It is like a religious experience."

All those who have marvelled at her fiery blend of jazz, classical and Afro-Cuban rhythms, who've got goosebumps from her otherworldly voice, will testify to feeling transformed. Whether onstage or on record there are few artists as impressively talented as Cañizares, a Havana-born, Swiss-based thirtysomething with a respect for the past and a feel for the future - oh, and a smile to die for.

Two acclaimed albums, 2013's self-produced *Ochumare* and 2015's *Invocación*, helmed by Alê Siqueira (Roberto Fonseca, Omara Portuondo) have strengthened Cañizares' reputation as a trailblazer and boundary crosser *por excelencia*. Not for nothing was she declared 'revelation of the year' by French weekly *Le Novel Observateur*: with her charisma, tapestry of influences and the ease with which she sings and plays violin simultaneously, Cañizares is a bona fide discovery. "My sound reflects the richness and mixture of cultures that I carry with me today," she says in her fluent, accented English. "It is who I am: a woman. A Cuban. A musician. A citizen of the world."

Cañizares grew up in Vedado, the neighbourhood next to Havana's Plaza de la Revolution. Early musical memories include her grandfather serenading her on guitar, and her mother singing as she accompanied herself on piano.

"Every weekend I'd be taken to see a classical orchestra, jazz quartet or salsa band," she remembers. "My mother said I'd be chatting away, telling her I wanted to be up on the stage."

Aged seven, she won a place at the prestigious Manuel Saumell music academy, to study piano and violin. This was the austerity-hit 1990s, Cuba's so-called 'Special Period': "It was tough getting equipment, getting anything," says Cañizares. She won the National Violin Contest of Cuba four times, nonetheless.

Cañizares was 14-years-old when she was offered a scholarship to study in Caracas, Venezuela. Two years later, a masterclass with a visiting Swiss-based teacher changed her life. "He told me I was gifted, and encouraged me to apply for a place at his music conservatory."

In 2000 Cañizares found herself in western Switzerland, where her playing and technique hit a whole new level. Big name orchestras beckoned: on moving to Lausanne she spent six years contributing note-perfect takes to symphonies, concertos and operas. Along the way, she began to feel like she was losing something. Craving a creative outlet, she quit.

"I was so inspired by [French jazz violinist] Stéphane Grappelli. The possibilities just blew me away. I wanted to translate this Grappelli universe to my tradition, and make it just as beautiful."

She assembled a quartet of musicians from Germany, Venezuela and Switzerland (and later, Cuba) and named it Ochumare, after the orisha deity of rainbows. Six months later, they won the 2008 Montreux Jazz Festival Competition. It's been upwards ever since. In 2011 she graced Giles Peterson's Havana Cultura project, and has gone on to share stages with jazz gods including Ibrahim Malouf and Omar Sosa. More recently,

she's sung in French and Yoruba, the language of her West African ancestors, enhancing the lyrics with AfroCuban percussion.

"The traditional Yoruba canon is a huge influence," she says. "These songs are melodic, rhythmic and powerful."

*Invocación* is a homage to Cañizares' nearest and dearest. Her parents, grandparents, husband. Cuban women. The Orishas. Icons such as French icon Piaf, Venezuelan composer Simón Diaz and Cuban poet Luis Carbonell.

"It wasn't until I was half way through making the album that I realised how much it was inspired by people who were no longer here. AfroCuban belief says the spirits of those you love and admire from a personal or artistic point of view continue to stay around you. I find that beautiful."

Yilian Cañizares, then. A woman born in Cuba and living in Switzerland. An artist as passionate about classical music as she is about jazz, salsa, hip hop and rhythms from elsewhere. A unique performer who, when called upon, is able to join voice and violin and express herself as an orchestra might.

"I have a relationship with the violin that is passionate and precious," she says of her current Italian-made instrument. "He is like a partner, a lover. We complement each other."

She pauses, smiles. "We still have a long way to go, he and I," she says. "Always to the service of the music, and the ancestors."

*Biography by Jean Cornwell*

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