

Why you need to catch one of the SoCal shows by Colombia's Monsieur Periné, the Grammy-winning masters of Latin swing

By Carolina A. Miranda / August 4, 2016

At a time when Latin music airwaves are dominated by the boom boom of reggaeton, it can seem otherworldly to have a bouncing swing number hit the airwaves, much less land on the charts. But that's just what happened when the Colombian band Monsieur Periné's single "La Muerte" (The Death) landed at No. 1 on that country's indie charts in 2011.

The song was not just a throwback. The effervescent fusion of Django Reinhardt-style gypsy jazz and South American cumbia — a combination that is practically impossible not to move to — prompted a chain reaction that the band is feeling to this day.

"They started to talk about us in the press," lead singer Catalina García says via telephone from Colombia. "It drew a lot of attention."

The higher profile brought the group more gigs around Colombia, and the band's sticky, hybrid fusions of '30s jazz and Latin rhythms — full of rapid-fire manouche guitar licks and wailing clarinets — drew ever wider audiences. The band produced a pair of well-received albums that extended its reach internationally, including last year's "Caja de Música," produced with the assistance of Eduardo "Visitante" Cabra of the high-profile Puerto Rican rap and rock act [Calle 13](#) — which earned Monsieur Periné a Grammy nomination and [a Latin Grammy win](#) for best new artist.

"We never expected any of this to be so powerful," García says. "To be nominated for the Anglo Grammy, to win the Latin Grammy, to be on tour — it goes beyond what we imagined."

Now, the band is bringing its singular sound to Los Angeles. On Thursday evening, the group plays play the [Santa Monica pier](#) as part of the Twilight Concert Series, on a lineup that includes Grammy Award-winning indie crooner [Natalia Lafourcade](#). And on Sunday, [Monsieur Periné headlines the Echoplex](#) in Echo Park — followed by another performance, next week, in San Diego.

As always, says García, "we'll be playing a combination of old and new."

It's been a wild ride for the group of friends — García, along with Santiago Prieto Sarabia and Nicolás Junca — who met as university students in Bogotá and began fooling around with classic Latin tunes in 2007.

"The first couple of years was without any plan," García says. "It was more just an excuse to be friends. We did a lot of covers of Latin American music: Brazilian music, *boleros*, tangos."

They played at weddings and family reunions. But Junca and Sarabia, inspired by recordings of Reinhardt tunes they found online, took the band headfirst into swing.

"They were so intrigued by the style," says García. "They learned to play in that style by listening to Reinhardt's music on YouTube."

That research also led them to other more contemporary swing acts: The bouncing soundtrack of the 2003 animated film "The Triplets of Belleville" and the music of groups such as [Paris Combo](#), which draw heavily from the nightclub swing tradition.

"We began to discover this whole wave of electro swing and swing that has exploded in Europe over the last 15 years," García says. "But we always mixed it with Latin American music. We might go from swing to *seis por ocho* [a type of regional waltz]. We started to mix instruments like the Peruvian box drum, manouche guitars, afro-Colombian elements. We started to find a way to express our way of appropriating swing."

Some of this was driven by the music of Colombia itself. The band has long studied the work of musicians such as [Lucho Bermúdez](#), who became known in the 1950s for taking coastal, afro-Caribbean tunes and re-writing them for big bands.

Says García: "It was music you could dance to."

For Monsieur Periné, the art lies in the fusion.

The band's second album, "Caja de Música," draws from a planetary range of influences. "Nuestra Canción" (Our Song) bounds along in a straightforward swing style then detours into afro-Caribbean rhythms. "Incendio" (Fire) is inspired by the ever quickening beats of Sephardic folk. "Marinero Wawani," in its waning chords, shouts out the 1930s ballad "Blue Moon."

Here and there are bits of samba, Andean instrumentation, jazz standards and straightforward pop — all deftly woven together with jazzy swing and García's youthful yet steely voice.

"The concept is the journey," she says. "You're visiting different landscapes, cultures, languages."

The best part of the trip? You can most definitely dance to it.

<http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/miranda/la-et-cam-monsieur-perine-shows-20160802-snap-story.html>