



Bio Ritmo – La Verdad – Out September 20, 2011 (Electric Cowbell Records)

Richmond, VA may not be the typical place that comes to mind when you think of an internationally acclaimed Salsa band, but Bio Ritmo is far from typical. The 10-member band was formed 20 years ago this September originally as a percussion ensemble brought together by two misplaced Puerto Ricans who met at art school combined with a local punk rock drummer. They have evolved over the years and become known as one of the most groundbreaking salsa bands of the last decade. Their sound is dubbed "post-salsa" and their style considered "old-school" or "alt-Latin," but essentially Bio Ritmo is known for being themselves, writing and producing all original music with the mind set of a rock-n-roll band who happens to play "in clave" (the basic rhythmic pattern of salsa music). "With a roster that includes former rastas, punks, rockers and jazzistas, Bio Ritmo can't help but bring an exhilarating unorthodoxy to its music." (WNYC)

La Verdad, the band's highly anticipated album is due out September 20, 2011 on Brooklyn's **Electric Cowbell Records** and will be available digitally, on CD and a limited pressing 12" - making Bio Ritmo the only salsa band that currently releases on vinyl. The legendary NYC hip-hop store/label turned distributor, **Fat Beats** will be handling distribution, adding yet another level of uniqueness to the mix. It makes sense that *La Verdad* is the first full-length album to be released on the boutique vinyl label Electric Cowbell. Label owner James Thomson was an original founder of the group (the aforementioned punk rock drummer) and their 45 "**Dina's Mambo**" b/w "**La Muralla**" was one of the first EC releases in 2010 and is still one of the most in-demand. Both tracks appear on the critically acclaimed EC compilation, *101 Things To Do In Bongolia*, as well as the exclusive "**Majadero**" (**That Little Chimps Remix**).

Rei Alvarez, a native of Ponce, Puerto Rico, is the lead singer, composer, visual artist and one of the original founders. Together with veteran timbale master/musical arranger **Giustino Riccio** (a misplaced New Jersey Italian who's been 18 years with the group), pianist/composer **Marlysse Simmons** (Washington DC/Chilean) and trombonist/composer **Tobias Whitaker**, they lead the group in writing songs that have helped renew an international interest in a return to the raw, experimental 70's style Salsa sound. Their inspiration comes not only from studying and listening to the salsa masters like, *El Gran Combo*, *Roberto Roena*, *Sonora Ponceña* and *Bobby Valentin*, but also bands like *The Who*, *Thomas Dolby*, *Stereolab*, *Buzzcocks*, *Roots Radics* and arabic singer *Abdel Halim Hafez*. With a recent tour to The Republic of Georgia in 2010, they've found new inspiration from that region's ancient singing traditions.

Alvarez explains their journey to this point, "We've always considered us students of salsa music and aimed at having a 'classic salsa' sound through our compositions, but always incorporating an experimental approach to our method. In our last album *Bionico* more of our individual influences came through to really define our style, beginning what felt like a new era. With *La Verdad*, we have remained on this new path, which seems to be the most truthful to our sound. Hence the album title and title track, which means 'the truth'. This message also comes through in the cover drawing, as well, which illustrates the quote "The soul must be open to fly free". Lyrically, as always, the songs themselves are a search for truth. Alvarez strives to stay relevant and concerned, but not without a good measure of humor (which is more apparent in the soneos- the responses to the coros, or choruses). "La Verdad" speaks of the inevitable circle of life, "La Muralla" deals with the imaginary wall we all seem to build around ourselves, and "Verguenza" is about a romantic relationship (a subject not usually visited by Alvarez). In "Majadero," a return to a more usual subject of Rei's: more "good advice" for the "lost souls" of the world. "I always try to include a positive message, because it's me that needs it most", he says. Another example of this is "Lola's Dilemma," a new version of one of the group's first recordings. "It's about a girl (or anyone, for

that matter) that parties way too much, so then is given the usual dish of sound advice”, comments Alvarez.

La Verdad features 6 new original songs plus a re-make of their 1997 hit cha-cha **Lola's Dilemma** (from *Que Siga La Musica*), a re-vamped version of **Carnaval** by the legendary Rafael Cortijo from the far out *Time Machine* (1974, *Coco Records*) and a bonus digital download remix of **Dina's Mambo** by DJ E's of NYC Trust. Besides the strong cascara (pattern played on timbale) and montuno (pattern played on piano), you'll feel the music flow in and out of Samba, Reggae, Cha-Cha-Cha and other rhythms, while staying true to the clave. Throughout the album you'll hear interesting sonic flourishes from an old Farfisa organ, to *Drumfire* (vintage electronic drum synthesizer), old moog-like synths, a Kalimba and Cuica. Having been recorded by fellow musician Lance Koehler (drummer for No BS Brass) in Richmond, the album still retains that "street salsa" sound, especially in the mix, which was nicely done by Grammy Award winner Aaron Levinson, who has worked with the likes of *The Spanish Harlem Orchestra*, among others.

Although Bio Ritmo is the flagship project, many of the band members have eclectic and notable side projects ranging from a Bolero group called **Miramar**, a two member one man band called **Fuzzy Baby**, the synth pop driven group **Amazing Ghost**, Brazilian project **Os Magrelos**, an all girl Beatles cover band named **The Girtles**, numerous Richmond Jazz projects including - **No BS Brass** and **Fight The Big Bull**, while conguero Hector Barez tours with **Calle 13**. With such a diverse and prolific output, you can start to imagine how Bio Ritmo sounds like no other salsa band out there. The band's style described as "post-salsa" leans more towards "indie-salsa," with their ethos and approach to the music being experimental, rebellious, and unconventional. The *Village Voice* recently agreed by calling their songs "...a taste of two-decade-strong indie salsa." No wonder why their first single was released as a 7-inch record through the indie stalwart **Merge Records**. If "indie" kids would ever get into salsa, Bio Ritmo would be their gateway.

So how does Richmond, VA produce such an experimental forward thinking salsa band? Just like many scenes that don't have as many major headlining acts roll through, the local arts and music scenes tend to develop their own style without as much outside influence. Think Seattle in the 80s, on how the isolated Pacific Northwest developed a unique sound of their own after being written off as a tour stop. Alvarez enthusiastically states, "Richmond has an amazing music, arts, and food scene. This is a real vintage loving town with a lot of history." Being on the fringes of salsa has paid off for the group. Simmons concludes, "We don't really fit in with the norm when it comes to salsa. A lot of people actually have issues with us since we don't look or act like a salsa band should. They get freaked out that we are from Richmond. Others are just scared of the world 'salsa.' I'm actually afraid of the word sometimes myself since the commercial market has completely ruined what once was such an awesome thing. We love breaking down the barriers, playing for people who appreciate good music and most of all we want people to dance however they feel like. If they know the dance steps or not it doesn't matter." One listen to *La Verdad* and we challenge you to sit still.

Bio Ritmo is:

Rei Alvarez, Voice, Percussion
Marlysse Simmons, Piano, Rhodes, Farfisa
Giustino Riccio, Timbales, Drumset, Cuica, Drumfire, Coro
Hector Barez, Conga
Mike Montañez, Bongo
Bob Miller, Trumpet, Moog, Coro
Mark Ingraham, Trumpet
Tobias Whitaker, Trombone
JC Kuhl, Tenor Sax
Edward Prendergast, Bass

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