

# Cachao Gives Latin Fest a *Gran* Evening

## JAZZ REVIEW

“**C**on Ritmo y Sabor,” the second annual Los Angeles Latin Jazz Festival, was billed as a tribute to “El Gran Cachao.” And it was a well-chosen dedication, the appropriate focus for an evening of roaring Latin jazz that drew a cheering overflow crowd of enthusiasts to the Universal Amphitheatre on Saturday night.

Eighty-year-old Cuban bassist Israel Lopez “Cachao,” the virtual creator of the mambo and one of the organizers of early, influential Latin-jazz jam sessions, is one of the pivotal figures in the decades-old blending of Latin rhythms and jazz improvisation. In addition to the tribute, he was inducted into the Latin Jazz Hall of Fame, and was additionally honored by a dedicatory set by three superb bassists: Al McKibbin, Andy Gonzales and Carlos del Puerto Jr.

But the highlight of the long,

consistently entertaining evening was the appearance of Cachao and his orchestra in a set that brilliantly illustrated his capacity to combine the spirit and improvisation of jazz with the irresistible rhythms of Cuban dance. Solos by saxophonist Justo Almario and flutist Danilo Lozano, among others, were balanced by the smooth, stirring vocals of Lazaro Galarraga, and underscored by the surging force of the Cachao-driven rhythm section. Most fascinating of all, in fact, was the opportunity to watch this legendary bandleader in action, propelling the music with his own instrumental fervor, shaping and directing the flow of events with simple waves of his hands and shifts of his body.

The program also included appearances by the Poncho Sanchez Latin Jazz Band, the Airtro Moreira & Flora Purim Quintet and the All

City Latin Jazz Student Ensemble.

Sanchez’s set was a characteristic display of danceable Latin jazz music, mixing the accessible melodies of such tunes as “Watermelon Man” and “Afro Blue” with stirring solo work from his three-man horn section and special guest flutist Hubert Laws. Moreira’s solo percussion number—filled with an amazing array of flutes, whistles, drums and grunts—as well as his equally scintillating duet with drummer Alex Acuna were the highlights of a set demonstrating the colorful linkages between jazz and Brazilian music. And the All City ensemble, a strikingly talented aggregation of young artists, played “Afro Blue” (conducted by Almario) with the kind of verve and enthusiasm that promise to keep Latin jazz alive and well far into the 21st century.

—DON HECKMAN