

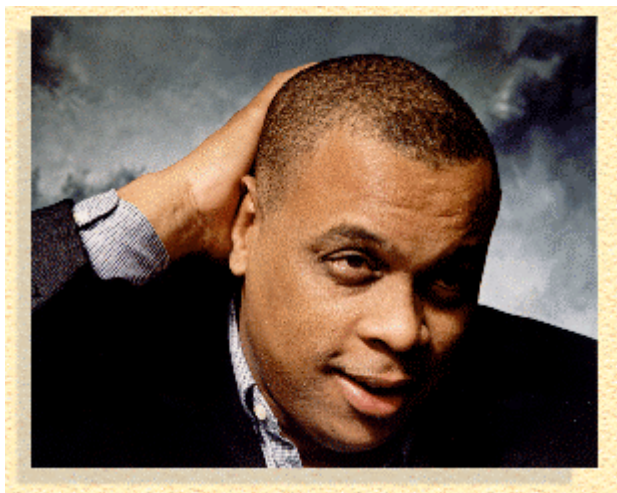
# Los Angeles Times

## Valdés lets his roots show

'Chuchito,' son and grandson of piano greats, makes his own potential known.

By Don Heckman  
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WITH a nickname like "Chuchito," there's not much doubt about the lineage of pianist Jesus Valdés Jr. He is the son of the much-honored Cuban pianist Jesus "Chucho" Valdés and the grandson of equally praised pianist Bebo Valdés. And his playing at Catalina Bar & Grill on Tuesday clearly displayed the significance of that extraordinary musical pedigree.



Valdés opened his set with a solo piano rendering of "Over the Rainbow," deconstructing then re-imagining the classic ballad from his own idiosyncratic, dissonance-splashed perspective. Here, as elsewhere in his playing, there were very few tropical pastels in the bold sweeps of primary colors that characterized Valdés' music. Like his father, he is not a minimalist, preferring instead to explore the full orchestral timbres of his instrument.

Valdés was then joined by saxophonist Laksar Reese, conga player Joey De León Jr., bassist Jorge "Sagua" Pérez and drummer Raúl Pineda for "Bossa Para Ti."

Despite the title, the tune had the flavor of a bolero, its cinematic-sounding melody calling up late-night urban imagery.

That juxtaposition of jazz with Latin visions dominated the balance of the set. A crisp, driving version of Billy Strayhorn's "Take the 'A' Train" and a muscular, percussion-heavy romp through Miles Davis' "Solar" were the most jazz-oriented items, with improvisational aspects supplied by the thick, chordal inventions of Valdés as well as Reese's inventive excursions across the gamut of his tenor and soprano saxophones.

In other material — Valdés' "Danzón" and "Montuneando" — Cuban dance qualities dominated. "Africa," with call and response singing from Valdés and his players, added a slight trace of the Afro aspects of Afro-Cuban music.

What was missing in the otherwise entertaining evening was a sense of Valdés' having taken any significant steps away from the pathways blazed by his noble predecessors.

Blessed with virtuosic technique, occasionally displaying a probing musical curiosity, he has yet to combine those qualities into the full-fledged musical artistry that lies well within his reach.