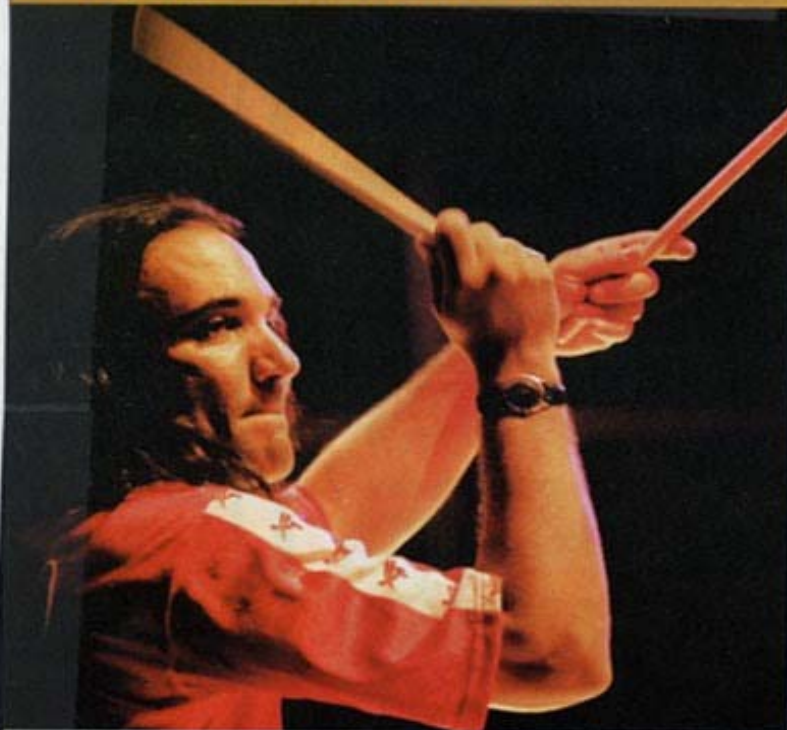




## OPENING CHORUS Hearsay



MIRIAM URZUA

Cuban jazz musicians: trumpeter Amik Guerra, bassist Daniel Martinez Izquierdo and pianist Ivan Bridon Napoles. The music on *Italuba* reflects the group's structured freedom within the clave but with an undeniable contemporary current.

While Hernandez's name is on the cover he says the group is really more a collaborative unit. "I don't want to be a leader, I would rather be one of the four," he says. "*Italuba* is really the four of us sitting around a table and working on different ideas and different ideas to make this music. The other three members bring to the table the freshness of the very youngbloods in Afro-Cuban music."

Hernandez was once one of those youngbloods in Cuban music (he turns 40 this year). Born into a very musical family, he started his formal musical training at the famed National School of the Arts in Havana. While he says traditional Cuban *son* was the lingua franca of his grandfathers and uncles, his father was a jazz DJ, one of the few in Cuba in his day. He says he was hearing Coltrane before he was even born.

After he finished school, he became the house drummer for the legendary EGREM studios in Havana. Hernandez calls the time spent there a finishing school for his later musical life. "I would go from studio to studio

doing sessions or rehearsals with all the top popular and traditional musicians in Cuba," he says. "I became very good at adapting to arrangers who had completely different approaches to the music." Hernandez says the studio became his second home. "I would sometimes play 20 hours a day. I had a small mattress set up so I could get a few hours of sleep in between sessions."

The drummer's breakthrough was becoming a member of Gonzalo Rubalcaba's groundbreaking Grupo Projecto, which was a jazz-fusion band with rumba roots. It was during their travels outside of Cuba that the world began to take notice of Horacio Hernandez. In 1990, he asked for asylum to the U.S. while on tour in Italy. Bureaucracy kept him there for 3 years, but he never lost sight of his ultimate goal: to set up shop in New York City, the jazz capital of the world.

Since coming to the U.S., Hernandez has played on recordings and tours around the world with the biggest names in jazz and Latin jazz, including McCoy Tyner, Paquito d'Rivera, Roy Hargrove, Rubalcaba and Michel Camilo to name a few. He won a Grammy as part of the team that recorded Santana's phenomenally successful *Supernatural*, and he has a respected career as a percussion educator.

Twenty-five years after that fateful rock 'n' roll gig, in an interesting twist that Hernandez calls destiny, Jack Bruce is one of the scores of musicians who now consider Hernandez a peer—the drummer plays on the bassist's latest CD, *More Jack Than God* (Sanctuary).

"Life is so wonderful, so miraculous that years after [getting arrested] I get a chance to record and play with Jack Bruce," he says. "That story always says to me that there is a life beyond any wrong that can happen or any bad situation you find yourself in. There is a lot of life out there with lots of surprises just waiting for us." **FELIX CONTRERAS**

## Horacio "El Negro" Hernandez

**W**hen drummer Horacio "El Negro" Hernandez was 14 years old he went to jail for playing "revolutionary" music in Cuba. "I was playing in the most popular rock 'n' roll band in Cuba," he explains from the safety of a public radio studio in New York. "It was a little kids' thing, but it was really happening. We'd have parties with 3,000 or 4,000 kids dancing. We were playing at a place on the beach one night when all of sudden the Special Forces came with huge lights and machine guns. They made everyone get on the floor and arrested us for being subversive, against the government."

Before being released to his parents Hernandez spent three weeks in a Havana maximum-security prison used to house those that challenged the government. He remembers that when the authorities came his band was playing "White Room," Cream's classic rock staple written by Jack Bruce.

Fast-forward 25 years and "El Negro" (a childhood nickname) Hernandez is now one of the most in-demand drummers in New York in both jazz and Latin jazz circles. He is no longer considered a subversive, but he is certainly agitating a new direction for Latin jazz with the release of the first CD under his name, *Italuba* (Universal Latino).

The CD was recorded two years ago in Torino, Italy—hence the CD title, which is a contraction of Italy and Cuba—with three other

# Backstage With ...

By Mark Ruffin

Horacio "El Negro" Hernandez, one of the most dynamic drummers on the jazz scene today, was refreshed the morning after playing a set at this year's Puerto Rico Jazz Festival with a group led by former Irakere pianist Tony Perez and featuring percussionist Giovanni Hidalgo. The Cuban timekeeper was staying in San Juan to officially introduce his new quartet and the release of his debut album, *Italuba*.

**I UNDERSTAND THAT THIS ALBUM HAS AN UNUSUAL GENESIS.**

This is truly a miracle that happened on what was supposed to be a solo tour in Italy. When I got there, I was announced with my band, and I didn't have one. It was a little freaky. Then the promoter told me, "Don't worry, we'll just jam. You do your solo thing and then we'll just jam with local musicians." I told the promoter, "If you want, I'll play solo 10 hours." I didn't want to play with people I didn't even know. Then I had a night off in Torino, where my tour took me, and I went to a club and I met the bass player (Daniel Martinez Izquierdo), who told me about this piano player (Ivan Bridon Napoles) and about a trumpet player (Amik Guerra) who was living in Torino. I met those players and it was an instant connection, something magical.

They are prominent Cuban musicians. They've had the chance to study McCoy, Herbie and Chick, but they have also had the chance to grow up listening to Gonzalo Rubalcaba. So they have more of a modern perspective, all that young blood and all that young fire.

**SPEAKING OF GONZALO RUBALCABA, YOU PLAYED WITH HIM FOR 10 YEARS, AND YOU'VE PLAYED WITH MICHEL CAMILO. LAST NIGHT HERE IN PUERTO RICO, YOU PLAYED WITH TONY PEREZ. WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENT STYLES YOU BRING PLAYING WITH THREE STYLISTICALLY DIFFERENT PIANISTS?**

They all have the forward motion of the Latin piano playing. Latin music has that forward groove. But they're all different. Gonzalo was born in a house where the most amazing Cuban piano tradition exists. Gonzalo's great-grandfather was a composer and a piano player. Gonzalo's father is an amazing piano player. So it's amazing when you see someone with the talent



Horacio 'El Negro' Hernandez

Gonzalo has growing up in a house where you can learn from the old to the young.

Michel comes from the Dominican Republic, and he has that same forward motion but with a different flavor. Cubans and Puerto Ricans, we are more rice and beans, and Dominicans are what is called mufungo, which is more like a plantain. You hear that in the music, too. You hear that Michel's influences are coming more from his roots.

Tony is a little more like my piano player on *Italuba*, somebody who studied Herbie and McCoy as well as Gonzalo and Michel. They're a new generation of musicians. Tony is 31, and Gonzalo is my age, 41. He's an amazing musician with a lot of energy. Now, 99 percent of what I play is listening. So, whomever you're playing with is feeding you something that he's putting out from something that you're giving to him.

**IN ADDITION TO TONY PEREZ, LAST NIGHT YOU HAD IN THE RHYTHM SECTION BASSIST CHARLES FLORES AND GIOVANNI HIDALGO. IT SEEMED SEAMLESS.**

I've been lucky enough to play with Giovanni quite a few times. He's like family, and he's also my idol. Musically, he's like a waterfall of music, non-stop. You can play with Giovanni for hours, and every second he's going to be breathing new life into the music. We were in Boston at a percussion festival at Berklee College of Music and we went into their studio and recorded an album, just the two of us. We put it out ourselves, but I'm always amazed when someone in Holland or Japan comes to me with that record. I'm honored to have a DVD out with him now.

DB



## **HORACIO "EL NEGRO" HERNANDEZ - ITALUBA**

Horacio "El Negro" Hernandez has been the power behind the most popular and influential Latin music of the past decade. Since leaving Cuba and arriving in New York in 1993, he's driven the efforts of Grammy Award-winners Michel Camilo, Roy Hargrove and Chucho Valdes, as well as Paquito D'Rivera, Gonzalo Rubalcaba and Carlos Santana, with a unique "Latin fusion" style that melds the steady press of the folkloric clavé with the fierce punch, crisp snap and deep grooves of today's jazz, pop, and rock. Now on **Italuba** (Pimienta Records), El Negro debuts as bandleader and co-composer, leaping to the fore of the next generation of Latin stars, bringing his native musicality to international crossover audiences.

"This is the first time I've found music and musicians who energize me to put all my passion into a project," says Hernandez, 40, of the album and his quartet -- all Cuban emigres he met in Torino while on solo tour in Italy. "I see **Italuba** as related to jazz and world as well as Cuban music. Like everything I do, it's Cuban, but with a wider vision."

Like the title "Italuba," which bridges Italy and Cuba, El Negro's sound from the opening "Free Latin" to the finale "Que Negro Esta" springs from tradition and heads for what's new. His drumming is quick and deft, unrelenting in propulsion yet suffused with a surprising array of timbral accents.

The CD's eight tracks (including "A Night in Torino," taking off from Dizzy Gillespie's bebop classic "Night in Tunisia") are all created collectively by the Italuba quartet. "It's a little bit of a workshop, when the four of us get together," El Negro explains. "Everybody brings their ideas and we build compositions out of it." Amik Guerra's lyrical and blazing trumpet and flugelhorn, Ivan Bridon Napoles' idiomatic and inventive piano/keyboards work, and pocket-perfect electric bass and baby bass playing by Daniel Martinez Izquierdo, at El Negro's direction, result in coherent though kaleidoscopic dimensions.

"We are at the point where we are letting the music play us, instead of us playing the music," El Negro says of the ease with which the players relate and blend. In doing so, **Italuba** exhibits the grace which characterized Proyecto, Gonzalo Rubalcaba's acclaimed group with which El Negro first traveled outside Cuba in 1980; the exuberance of pianist Camilo's trio with El Negro, which won the 2003 Latin Jazz GRAMMY for its two-CD set "Live at the Blue Note"; the authenticity of trumpeter Hargrove's "Crisol," for which El Negro shared a Grammy in 1997, and the accessibility of Santana's "Supernatural," which El Negro helped produce. He also performed on Alejandro Sanz's "No Es Lo Mismo" CD, which won the 2003 Best Latin Pop Album GRAMMY.

At the core of Italuba's repertoire are the classic Afro-Cuban rhythms that underlie all styles of Latin America -- the rumba, guaguanco, danzon, mambo, and modernized montunos called "timba," popularized by Cuban ensembles like Los Van Van and NG. The knowledge and flexibility of El Negro and his fellows allows their music to flow freely and from their hearts, as when they break from the "Night in Tunisia" theme to quote "Guantanamera," Jose Marti's enduring ode to the Cuban island.

As a political refugee from Cuba, Horacio "El Negro" Hernandez sings of his homeland and heritage in every measure of Italuba, and also of his larger ambition. "I hope," the drummer says, "the music will help us to tear down the political barriers, and we can take this music to the whole world." Busy globetrotting with his Italuba quartet, El Negro is well on his way.

Release date: May 13, 2004

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## Horacio "El Negro" Hernández

Born in Havana in the spring of 1963, Horacio "El Negro" Hernández must be regarded as one of the greatest Latin American trap drummers of our times. The son of one of Cuba's most notable jazz connoisseurs, Negro was fortunate to study with some of Havana's top drumming technicians, including Fausto Garcia Rivera and Irakere's Enrique Plá, the latter of whom had been imaginatively applying folkloric Afro-Cuban patterns to the drumset since the early 1970s.

Negro's inventive musical spirit was documented in his 1980s collaborations with Gonzalo Rubalcaba's highly experimental Grupo Proyecto. After his inevitable defection from the Antillean "dictatorship of the proletariat," circa 1990, he has recorded with a wide range of New York-based Latin jazz luminaries, such as Paquito D'Rivera, Michel Camilo, Steve Turre, Juan Pablo Torres and the late Tito Puente.

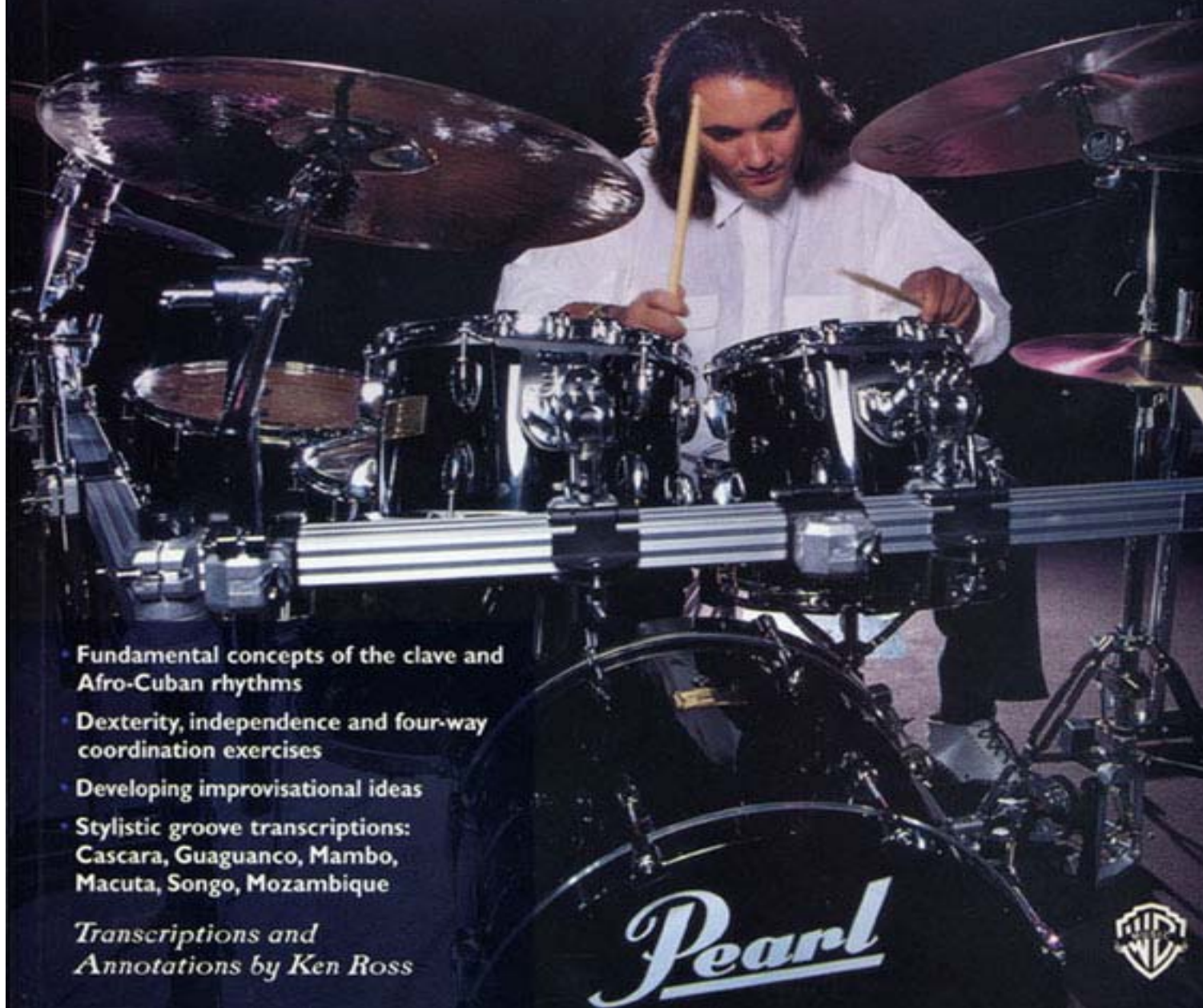
When it comes to Latin jazz drumming, there is something that cannot be denied: Like El Negro, there is no other. —Luis Tamargo

# CONVERSATIONS IN CLAVE



by *Horacio "El Negro" Hernandez*

The Ultimate Technical Study of Four-Way  
Independence in Afro-Cuban Rhythms



- Fundamental concepts of the clave and Afro-Cuban rhythms
- Dexterity, independence and four-way coordination exercises
- Developing improvisational ideas
- Stylistic groove transcriptions: Cascara, Guaguanco, Mambo, Macuta, Songo, Mozambique

*Transcriptions and  
Annotations by Ken Ross*

*Pearl*



# About the Author



**G**rammy Award winner and internationally renowned recording artist Horacio "El Negro" Hernandez was born in Havana, Cuba, into a family with rich musical heritage, deeply rooted in traditional Cuban music and well-versed in American jazz currents. His own talent became evident early. At age twelve, "El Negro" was accepted by the prestigious Escuela Nacional de Arte, where he majored in drums and percussion. There he studied with the finest Cuban teachers, including Fausto Garcia Rivera, himself a student of famed American teachers Lawrence Stone and Henry Adler, and Enrique Pla, the drummer for the ground-breaking group "Irakere," and Santiago Rieter, the most influential of modern Cuban drummer-percussionists.

While still very young, Horacio began to work professionally in the group of well known Cuban saxophonist Nicolas Reynoso. As part of the exciting musical scene of 1980s Havana, he worked with all its dominant musicians; among them Paquito D'Rivera, Lucia Huergo, Arturo Sandoval, and German Velazco. He quickly became the most in-demand drummer of Egrem, the major recording studios in Cuba and making hundreds of recordings with them.

In 1980, "Negro" joined Cuban pianist and composer Gonzalo Rubalcaba's innovative group, "Proyecto." He played, toured and recorded with the group for ten years. Though he continued to work and record with the best Cuban and international musicians, including Dizzy Gillespie's United Nations Orchestra, it was with Rubalcaba that he developed his distinct drumming style—the potent mixture of Afro-Cuban and jazz elements that has made him an artist of extraordinary power and musical versatility.

He moved to Rome in 1990 and soon became the energizing force in that city's jazz and Latin music circles, working and recording with Pino Danielle, Gary Bartz, Steve Turre, Gary Smulyan and Mike Stern. He also formed his own band Tercer Mundo. During his stay in Rome he chaired the Latin Percussion department of the Centro di Percussione Timba and taught at the Universita della Musica, while also conducting many drum clinics throughout Italy.

Hernandez arrived in New York in 1993 and immediately began to work with such celebrated jazz musicians as Paquito D'Rivera, Dave Valentin, Jerry Gonzalez and the Fort Apache Band, the Ed Simon Trio, Anthony Jackson, Kip Hanrahan, David Sanchez, Papo Vazquez, Steve Turre and the Sanctified Shells, Santi Debriano and the Panamaniacs, the Cepeda family's Afro-Rican Jazz, Giovanni Hidalgo, Arturo Sandoval, Regina Carter, Chico O'Farrill and Tito Puente, as well as with In the Spirit, a rhythm and blues/rock/funk band.

"El Negro" was also a member of the Michel Camilo Trio, playing percussion on Camilo's original soundtrack for the film *Two Much*. He was the featured drummer for San Francisco's memorable concert, *Irakere West*, lead by famed Cuban pianist, Chucho Valdes, with special guest star Carlos Santana. He has become a member of the Tropi-Jazz All-Stars



under the direction of Tito Puente, a band that includes Hilton Ruiz, Eddie Palmieri, Giovanni Hidalgo, Dave Valentin, Juan Pablo Torres and Charlie Sepulveda among other Latin greats.

After several international engagements as a guest artist with Roy Hargrove's Crisoul band, (the band features Hargrove, Gary Bartz,

Frank Lacey, David Sanchez, Changuito, Jon Benitez, Anga Diaz, Russel Malone and Chucho Valdes), Hernandez joined the band to record their first CD entitled *Habana*. This debut recording earned Crisoul the 1997 Grammy Award for best recording in the Latin-jazz category.

Horacio also recorded with Michel Camilo, John Patitucci and Anthony Jackson on a Camilo release entitled "Thru My Eyes." "El Negro's" true essence is captured on the track "A Night in Tunisia." He has also appeared with McCoy Tyner.

In 1997 Negro toured with Santana and recorded two tracks for Santana's Grammy Award-winning "Supernatural" recording.

He is a member of the faculty of the Drummer's Collective and the New School in New York and the Percussion Institute of Technology in Los Angeles, where he is teaching as part of the Master Artists series with Steve Houghton and Gary Chaffee. He also conducts regular workshops at the prestigious Berklee School of Music in Boston and the Stanford University Jazz Workshop in Palo Alto. Horacio is an endorser and clinician for Pearl Drums and Zildjian cymbals and has been a featured artist at numerous industry events, including NAMM and the Percussive Arts Society International Convention.