

Weekly Latin Jazz Video Fix: Mongorama

Any artist that experiences a life long career in music moves through a series of phases that define an era in their creative work. Any musician evolves over time - it's just a natural life course that emerges in artistic expression. In the moment, these changes seem like important courses that overflow from



the artist's interests and influences. The interesting perspective upon these changes occurs in hindsight though, as future musicians dig back through an artist's repertoire. These reflective investigations that narrow into one specific point can bring intriguing music to the surface and inspire a completely new artistic focus.

José Rizo has spent his extensive career in working in the Latin Jazz world both as a performer and a radio personality, most recently digging into Mongo Santamaria's "La Sabrosa" charanga group. Raised in Oxnard, California, Rizo played music in his childhood but became deeply attached to jazz during his studies at University of California at Santa Barbara. During this time, he developed a radio show that focused upon Latin Jazz and salsa while also producing live events with local artists. Rizo established himself on KJAZ (formerly KLON) in the nineties and began his "Jazz On The Latin Side" show, which grew into an immensely popular feature. As the show grew into a cornerstone of KJAZ programming, Rizo became involved with major Los Angeles live music events, such as the Central Avenue Jazz Festival. Rizo celebrated ten years of "Jazz On The Latin Side" programming in 2000 with a Latin Jazz jam session at B.B. King's, and the event sparked an idea. Many of the musicians that appeared at the jam session became the core of Rizo's first band, The Jazz On The Latin Side All-Stars. This powerhouse group included top-notch Los Angeles musicians such as saxophonist Justo Almario, bassist Rene Camacho, pianist Joe Rotondi, and many more. The group produced their first recording in 2005, [*The Last Bullfighter*](#), and followed it in 2009 with [*Tambolero*](#). The recordings were very successful, spreading the word about the band around the world and keeping them busy with local performances. In 2010, Rizo decided to change musical directions, forming a new band that focused on Santamaria's charanga output during the sixties. This era in Santamaria's career pre-

dated his move into funk driven Latin Jazz, and featured some amazing performances from musicians such as saxophonist Jose “Chombo” Silva, flautist Rolando Lozano, percussionist Willie Bobo, bassist Victor Venegas, and more. Once again, Rizo found numerous kindred spirits among Los Angeles’ Latin music scene, bringing together a group that includes Almario, flautist Danilo Lozano, percussionist Ramon Banda, pianist Oscar Hernandez, and many more. The resultant band, Mongorama, has delved into Santamaria’s early repertoire, reviving it with a modern perspective while including some additional original material. The group will be releasing a recording in June that includes their own take on Santamaria’s music with help from guest artists Poncho Sanchez and Hubert Laws. While Rizo moves into a new point in his career, Mongorama revisits a very specific time in Santamaria’s career, giving the world some fantastic music.

Rizo sheds some long overdue light upon this early phase in Santamaria’s career with Mongorama, reminding the world that this point in his career included important music. Santamaria fans will be enthralled with Mongorama’s work and Latin music fans unfamiliar with the legend will be reaching into archives after hearing the recording. In celebration of the upcoming release of Mongorama, today’s Weekly Latin Jazz Video Fix is dedicated to Rizo, Mongorama, and The Jazz On The Latin Side All-Stars. The first clip features Mongorama performing one of Rizo’s original tunes from the album, “Bubba’s Boogaloo.” The second video finds the group at Steamer’s Jazz Club, jamming with local percussionist Melena. Mongorama performs at the Central Avenue jazz festival in the third snippet, with a piece that highlights violinist Dayren Santamaria. The last video focuses upon The Jazz On The Latin Side All-Stars with a performance of “The Last Bullfighter.” Rizo has spent his whole career deep in quality music, and as you’ll see here, this new exploration into Santamaria’s work continues that tradition - enjoy!