



AfroBop Alliance

CAMINO NUEVO – Mambo Maniacs Records #804865155. www.cubop.com. 355 Market Street; Patterson, NJ 07501. *Soon; Lo Time; Seven Steps to Heaven; Armando's Rumba; Tom Thumb; Peruchin; In Love In Vain; Afro Green; Back To Bayview; Bye-Ya*

PERSONNEL: Joe McCarthy, drums, timbale, bells, guiro, cajon, chekere, palmas; Luis Hernandez, tenor saxophone; Tim Stanley, trumpet; Dan Drew, trombone; Harry Appleman, piano; Max Murray, bass, palmas; Felix Contreras, congas, bongo, chekere; Poncho Sanchez, congas; Dave Samuels, vibes and marimba; Paula McCarthy, violin; Suzanne Orban, cello

By Curtis Davenport

Most of us have heard the old adage about what happens when we "assume." For those of you who haven't, I won't repeat it here - in a "family" magazine. However, I will direct you to a classic episode of *The Odd Couple* television series, to find out the punch line. I must confess to being perhaps a little bit guilty of making a few minor assumptions when I first looked at the credits for this CD, which served as my introduction to this group, AfroBop Alliance. I read the back of the album package and noticed that, among the members of the core septet, there were only two Hispanic surnames. I was then foolish and ignorant enough to entertain a brief moment of skepticism, concerning this group's ability to play credible Afro-Cuban music, based solely on their family names. I now say that the chomping sound that you hear in the background is this reviewer eating a giant helping of crow; for this is one hot Latin jazz disc!

The seven core members of AfroBop Alliance all reside in the Annapolis, Maryland area. They perform mostly in the mid-Atlantic region. They are led by drummer Joe McCarthy, a master musician whose Latin Jazz credentials are unassailable. He has been a sideman with such Latin music notables as Poncho Sanchez, Mike Mossman, Arturo O'Farrill and Ray Vega. With Annapolis as a home base, it should come as no surprise that several of the members of the group are either current or former members of one of the U.S. Navy's jazz ensembles. *Camino Nuevo*, is the group's second disc, a follow-up to their 2004 debut, *Encarnacion*; a disc which I am yet to hear, but I will be rectifying that oversight in the very near future. *Camino Nuevo* is successful

because, like the best work of Poncho Sanchez, who guests on a track here; and of the late great, Tito Puente, during his Concord Picante years, this music has one foot firmly planted in the Latin and the other in the Jazz and truly gives us the best of both worlds.

Like Tito and Poncho, AfroBop Alliance also draws freely from compositions by noted jazz and "Tin Pan Alley" composers for musical inspiration. The musical tension created by the competing idioms, creates results that are never less than interesting and in several cases, awesome. In that latter category, I would place four tracks: the cool and jazzy "Lo Time," which is driven by a superb call and response theme, between a unison horn line and Harry Applebaum's intoxicating electric piano. This gives the whole track an overriding seventies feel. Luis Hernandez on the tenor and Tim Stanley on trumpet turn in some tasty solo work here. Chick Corea's "Armando's Rumba," is also extremely memorable, thanks in large part to the guest stars. There's Spyro Gyra's own Dave Samuels, who delivers the goods with some hard driving work on the marimba. Not to be outdone are violinist Paula McCarthy (Joe's wife) and cellist Suzanne Orban, who play their lines in tandem and create a striking underpinning for the rest of the song. Wayne Shorter's "Tom Thumb" is given the first Latin treatment that I have ever heard it receive and the results are anything but small. Applebaum lays down a keyboard vamp straight out of "Oye Como Va," McCarthy and conguero/NPR Reporter Felix Contreras set an addictive rhythm base and then the horns come in with the familiar theme. Trombonist Dan Drew really shines here on his solo. The whole track has a Latin Boogaloo vibe, that gives us an idea of what a Shorter meets Willie Bobo collaboration might have sounded like. The pinnacle is reached on "Peruchin," Charlie Otwell's tribute to the late Cuban pianist, Pedro "Peruchin" Justiz. This was a song originally performed by Poncho Sanchez and the master conguero himself is here, as a guest performer. Peruchin was a king of the "descarga" and he would be proud of the results. The presence of Sanchez seems to prod the group toward even greater heights and they have produced a track that is a delight for listeners as well as dancers. Applebaum's clave is right on the money, Max Murray's bass line is straight out of Cachao and the horns are in top form as they trade fours in the middle of the piece. I couldn't stop hitting repeat on this one and I think that many other Latin jam fans will be just as addicted.

While these were the best tracks on the disc, the remaining six tracks are also first rate and will not disappoint. AfroBop Alliance's *Camino Nuevo* is a dynamite recording from a top flight group of musicians who know their Afro-Cuban music and can give the best Latin Jazz bands working today, a run for their money. If you are a fan of the Latin and Jazz fusion played by Poncho, Tito or the underrated Manny Oquendo and Libre, this is a disc that you should add to your collection.