

The Music Makers – Lucho, Papito, Leroy, Mario, Tito, and Frank
By
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As teenagers growing up in the Canal Zone, we were exposed to two diverse music rhythms. Over SCN/Armed Forces Radio or HOXO “Hit Parade,” we heard the rock-n-roll songs of the Everly Brothers and Elvis or dreamy voices of Patti Page, Perry Como, and Connie Francis. And, of course, we’d listen to the county-western “Bunk-House Roundup” music of Patsy Cline, Roy Orbison, or Marty Robbins. These were the vinyl 45s we danced to at various sock-hops. But, for LIVE music, the Latin Panamanian tamboritos and boleros captured our hearts and set our feet—indeed, our whole bodies—a-dancing. The Panamanian conjuntos relied on an electric organ for the melody and batteria of drums for the rhythm. For me, this is the music that can erase miles and years with a single song and dominates the selections on my iPod.

Initially, el maestro Lucho Azcarraga was by far the most popular and played at most dances at Balboa High School, the Hotel Tivoli, or the Ft. Amador Officers’ Club. In 1962, the Panama Hilton installed a 259-stop Grand Wurlitzer organ, called “El Bombarde,” and brought in Leroy Lewis to mesmerize us with his talent. For a change of pace, I often frequented the Hotel Internacional on Avenida Central to listen to the unique conjunto of Papito Baker (piano, clarinet, and bass). In the early ’60, Mario Fabrega burst upon the scene playing at various clubs (Lions, Elks, Union, and Panama Golf) around Panama. When I left Panama, I thought I’d never again be fortunate enough to hear live those rhythms that stirred my feet and heart; but with the Panama Canal Society Reunions, each year I again can hear and dance to those songs played by Tito Mouyynes and “Padre Salsa” Frank Pretto.

Here are “The Music-Makers”:

Luis “Lucho” Enrique Deliot Azcarraga was born January 1, 1912, in Panamá City, Panamá. When he was 6 months old, he contracted polio which atrophied his left leg. Nevertheless, he overcame his disability and mastered the organ. At age 8, he started playing the piano at home and took lessons from Maria Ines Endara de Riba. By age 9, he was earning tips playing at the Union Club. Lucho was the music of Panama—playing at the high school dances, traveling on the Panama Line ships, and getting top billing at social events across the Isthmus. He was synonymous with dancing.

He composed “Querube”, and “Marta” and “Palo de Hembra”. His conjunto members were Alfred “Chipi” Azcarraga, who played the maracas; Frankie Azcarraga, who played “el tambor”; and Jaime De Garcia, who was on the drums. Although Lucho passed in November 1996, his music still lives on.

Lucho is immortalized in his many record albums:

1. Alegria en Panama
2. Bailando en Panama
3. Carnaval de Oro en Panama

4. Carnaval en Panama
5. El Nuevo Panama Fiesta
6. Golden Anniversary Panama Canal Society
7. Lindo Panama
8. Lucho en Peru
9. Melodias Tropicales
10. Mi Panama
11. Noche en Panama
12. Panama
13. Panama Fiesta
14. Panama Tipico
15. Panama Presenta
16. Recuerde Panama
17. Siesta en Panama

References

http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lucho_Azcarraga

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ettUycRK_Eg

Music

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ePHlkm32k0> (Café Duran)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CEN1rzq2rqw> (Marta)



Lucho and Frank Townsend – 1992

Alfredo Noel Papito Baker, known as Pianista Panameño, played for many years at the Hotel Internacional. His conjunto was different in that, he was a pianist, instead of an electronic organist. Since the dance floor at the Internacional was quite small, his conjunto consisted of a clarinet, a string bass viola, and drums so that the music was not overpowering. Papito accompanied Lucho on several of his albums.

He recorded 2 albums:

1. En el Internacional
2. Ritmos Panamenos en Blanco y Negro

Music:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ND-b_q8ZDfU&feature=youtu.be (Ansiedad)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFw6uYDvqQ&feature=youtu.be> (Chiricanita)



Leroy Lewis is considered one of the greatest organists from the US. He was born in Reading, Pa., May 7, 1935, and began playing piano at age 5. By the time he was 14, he was playing professionally at a restaurant in Poland, Ohio. In 1957, he assisted in assembling a Wurlitzer Theater Pipe Organ at the Surf City Hotel, Long Beach Island, NJ. In July 1962, he was persuaded by John Doyle, manager of the Panama Hilton Hotel, to come to Panama. He and his assistant assembled one of the largest three manual keyboard organs ever built by Wurlitzer. Leroy enchanted the crowds at the Panama Hilton for 4 years.

He recorded 3 albums on the Grand Wurlitzer “El Bombarde” and was backed up by Mario Fabrega and conjunto.

1. Leroy Lewis’ Panama
2. The Pipe Organ at the Crossroads
3. Christmas on the Isthmus

Leroy passed in 2000 at age 65 of cancer in Winter Park, FL. His fingers may have been stilled, but his music lives on and will set toes tapping as long as there are ears to hear.

References

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BfRDM86icMI&feature=related>

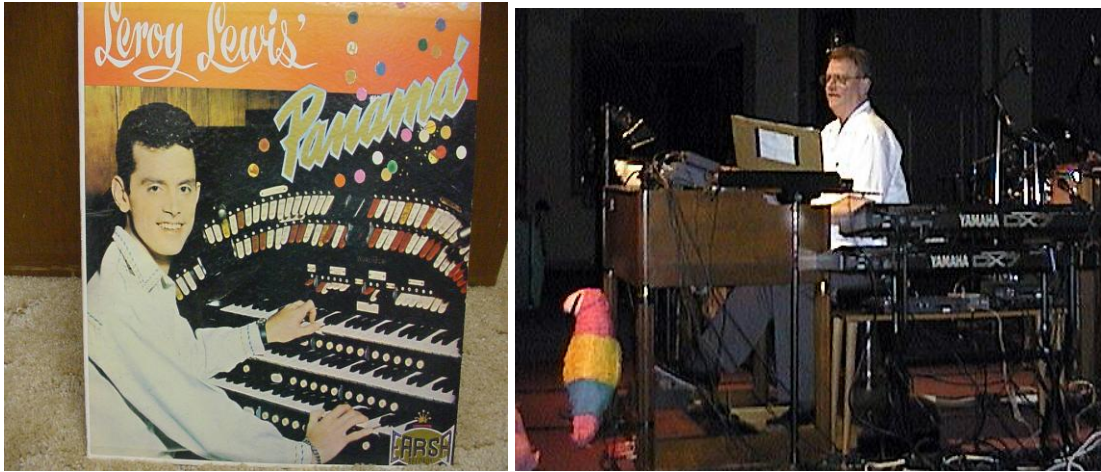
<http://njcareerlink.com/2012/04/21/leroy-lewis-panama/>

<http://www.czimages.com/CZMemories/LeroyLewis/leroylewis.htm>

Music

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fdZmQt1sJ48> (Tamboreras Panameñas)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UdA0R4p5MdM> (La Botijuela-Panamá Soberana)



Mario Fabrega was born in Panama December, 1940, and formed his conjunto in the early '60s, playing at a variety of clubs. His conjunto consisted of Coqui Fabrega (maracas), Luis Segura (native tambor), and Pepe Zamora (drums). Mario composed many songs: Anoranza, Tierra Mía, Este Amor, El Parrandero, La Pisamuerto, Panama Bonito, and Hotel Panama.

He received his Bachelor of Economic Science from the University of Panama in 1966, but music was his joyful vocation.

His albums include

1. Fiesta de Ritmos
2. Panama Bonito
3. Panama, Puente de las Americas
4. De Gala
5. Muestreo

Music:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HSsv4JPbS48>

Ramon "Tito" Mouynes was born in Panama City in 1948, but resided in Colon. He grew up on the Atlantic Side, attended Colegio La Salle in Colon, and lived there in Fort De Lesseps where, coincidentally, Frank Pretto also lived a block away; both are "Colon Buays." He began piano lessons at age 7. Recognizing his boredom with classical music at that time, his piano teacher started bringing sheet music with Tamboreras, Boleros and Pasillos from Ricardo Fábrega, Alberto Galimany, and others, which he quickly memorized. He formed his group (Tito Mouynes y su Conjunto) in 1964 while a senior in high school, using an old WW II vintage Hammond organ that, with his electronics background, he proceeded to re-wire and improve. They played at the old Strangers Club

in Colon, the Breakers Club in Coco Solo, and all of the Officers' and NCO clubs on the Atlantic Side, as well as at many Cristobal High School functions.

His unofficial mentor and model was Lucho Azcárraga. He adapted songs from Lucho's albums to his own style and repertoire. He fondly recalls many dances in the 60's at which Lucho allowed him to play a song or two, sometimes even a full set, with his group.

He attended Canal Zone College for two years, which brought the Conjunto to play on the Pacific Side as well as the Atlantic. He was invited to play on the September and June SS Cristobal "College Special" In 1967- 1972, he attended the University of Florida receiving degrees in Electrical Engineering and an MBA, returning to Panama occasionally to play at Carnival time and during summers. His drummer, Alex De La Cruz, joined the group in 1974 and still plays with Tito after almost forty years. The other conjunto members who play at the Panama Canal Society Reunions and in Panama are Gerardo Leyton, Arturo Rawlins and Carlos Rodgers, his former roommate at the University of Florida (who also plays with Frankie) and Colaquito Cortez. He also played for many years at the West Coast Panama Canal Reunion in San Diego until the mid 90's.

Tito has produced 4 recordings from the Panama Society Reunions:

1. Vivo (Tape Cassette)
2. Live recorded at 75th Reunion, 2007, released as CD 2009
3. Live #2
4. Live #3 recoded 2010 yet to be released.

Music:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OGA2h543L1E>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F9YHCQl8Zlc>



Frank “Padre Salsa” Preto was born in Colon, Republic of Panama, on January 27, 1946. He began his musical career playing piano at age 14 in Colon, R de Panama. He graduated from Colegio San Jose, La Salle Colon 1963.

After Leroy Lewis left, Frank took over playing the Grand Wurlitzer Organ at the El Bombarde room at the El Panama Hilton Hotel. Many years later (1972) Frank was ordained a Roman Catholic Priest of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, and has been Pastor at San Isidro Catholic Church, Santa Fe, NM, since August of 1982. He holds a BA degree in Thomistic Philosophy, 1969, and an MA degree in Divinity, 1971.

He formed his current (he's had at least 8 over the years) conjunto in the summer of 1988, playing at the Sheraton, Santa Fe, The Radisson, The Hilton, Club Alegria, La Fonda Hotel, The Desert Inn Hotel, The El Dorado hotel, and others. He began playing for the Panama Canal Society annual Reunions in 1992 and has become a centerpiece for the PanaZonian Saturday night dance.

The “Parranda” conjunto consists of Frank (organ); Roosevelt Armendariz, since 1975, (drummer); Carlos Santiago (congas); Frank Paul Garcia, deceased 1990, (maracas); Mario Garcia, deceased 2004; Alan Tey; Frank Becerra, moved to NJ in 2006, (percussion).

Frank has produced 3 recordings:

5. Cosa Buena (Tape Cassette)
6. Tropicalisimo con El Padre Salsa - 1995
7. Preto y Parranda En Vivo Vol. 1 - 2012

References:

<http://www.santafenewmexican.com/SantaFeNorthernNM/Last-serving-of-salsa>

SEE PAGE 169: http://books.google.com/books?id=1_Ehkx8-3ckC&pg=PA169&lpg=PA169&dq=father+frank+pretto&source=bl&ots=nXO6OVlzUO&sig=zHcLrqI0JtSnRubUhSBr4aZCnWw&hl=en&sa=X&ei=IXz0T6bQL6Pa2AXLrtzWBg&ved=0CFgQ6AEwCQ#v=onepage&q=father%20frank%20pretto&f=false

Music:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4f76gjpfQQ>



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