



Tito Rodriguez, Jr
Transición

Tito
Rodriguez Jr
Press Kit

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Biography

Name: Tito Rodríguez, Jr.

Born: February 20, 1955

Birth Place: New York, NY



Tito Rodríguez, Jr. is one of the leading timbales artists in Tropical Music and Latin Jazz today. Raised in New York, Tito was born to Puerto Rican and Japanese and parents, the only son of the legendary *El Inolvidable* (*The Unforgettable*), Tito Rodríguez and Takeko Rodríguez.

From an early age, Tito was immersed in the riveting sounds of Mambo, Chachacha, Bolero, Brazilian music and Jazz. Trained in drums, piano, vibes, trombone and timbales, Tito was admitted to the prestigious Berklee

College of Music and received his BA from the University of Miami.

Prodigiously gifted as an arranger, composer, producer, and bandleader, Latin superstars Marc Anthony, Gilberto Santa Rosa, and La India have all called on Tito to compose arrangements. He made a mark in TV theme songs, arranging the signature tune for the syndicated Sally (Jessy Raphael) Show.

Tito has toured extensively, performing at prestigious venues including Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center, Jazz at Vienne, Tiempo Latino, Burgenhausen Jazz Festival, Istanbul Jazz Festival and the Ravinia Jazz Festival. As guest artist, Tito has appeared at Carnegie Hall. Tito distinguished himself in Puerto Rico at la Día Nacional de la Salsa, the Teatro Yaguez, Parque De Las Ciencias and Centro de Bellas Artes. His television appearances include Telemundo, BET Jazz Network and the BBC.

At age 21, Tito's first album, *Curious?*, was released on one of the first artist-owned labels, TR Records, founded by *El Inolvidable* himself. The recording featured José Alberto, "*El Canario*", on vocals and Adalberto Santiago and Ruben Blades on Coro. *Curious?* continues to enhance playlists around the world; reaching initial gold record status in Africa, *Curious?* has recently been re-released as a Latin Jazz classic by

Biography

Pimiento Records, distributed by Universal Music Group.

Next came the much-anticipated album *Eclipse*. Released by Tito and released by Top Ten Records, The Tito Rodriguez, Jr. Orchestra debuted *Eclipse* on the Spanish Broadcasting System nationwide. Tito's sophisticated way with lyrics, melody and Latin rhythm instantly became a global sensation, appealing to both dancers and listeners. *Eclipse's* hit single *Mujer Erotica* hit number one on national and international charts for six weeks; to-date the album has continuous airplay at Salsa Congresses.

In 2002, Tito combined forces with Mario Grillo (Machito, Jr.) to perform original charts from the era of their fathers. The resulting powerhouse album *The Big 3 Palladium Orchestra: Live at the Blue Note*, with its "screaming horn section, frenzied rhythm section and its high-octane, bone-crushing arrangements" was met with critical acclaim worldwide.

Its popularity was amplified with an American debut at the Verizon Jazz Festival, a European debut at the Pori Jazz Festival in Finland, and extensive tours across the United States, Puerto Rico, and Europe that included stops at Tanglewood Jazz Festival, the Hollywood Bowl and Lincoln Center. Demand for the *The Big 3 Palladium*

Orchestra: Live at the Blue Note, inspired DiscMedi to re-release it in 2008.

Wanting to keep his father's music and legacy alive, Tito assembled an "all star" lineup of prominent Puerto Rican musicians and launched the Tito Rodríguez Orchestra with Tito Rodríguez, Jr. to critical success. The orchestra plays the original charts, infused with Tito's expertise and energy. Evolving his father's original Mambo beat with a contemporary twist, a new sound was introduced, immersing eager audiences in nostalgia.

Paralleling his recording and touring, Tito has established a network of Latin Jazz insiders and has cultivated his creative artistry. Plans for annual recording are in the works, as Tito expands his repertoire with a future label for talented artists.

With his father's music is a continual source of inspiration and Tito honors his legacy with a new album, *Transición*, an auditory and visual tribute to his father and mother, released in December of 2017.

Reviews & Quotes

Transición CD Review: “With the release of *Transición*, Tito Rodriguez, Jr. has raised the bar for this genre’s future productions. He has injected into the Latin music industry new lifeblood, resulting in revitalization, which many did not think possible. His dynamic CD, tailored for the dancer, dazzles and delights—it respects the legacy of his legendary father and the roots of the music, yet blasts into the future with new possibilities.”

- Vicki Solá, WFDU-FM and Mundo Salsa Radio, 2018

Transición CD Review: “I can't stop listening to this album. And it's not just a few tracks; it's the entire CD from start to finish. Tito Rodriguez, Jr's *Transición* is a game-changing Salsa gem crafted with the dancer in mind. Exquisitely executed arrangements coupled with soul-piercing vocals, Rodriguez shows and proves yet again with *Transición* that his releases are worth the wait. Any floor surface becomes a dance floor once "*Bailando Con La Mas Fea*" starts playing. "*Volver*", featuring the vocal styling's of Grammy-winner Gilberto Santa Rosa entrances the salsa-lover and keeps you listening all the way through to the sultry cha cha cha "*Para Ti Morena*" and the heavy-hitting crowd-pleaser "*Para Los Billadores*". You will be hitting repeat on every track, like I did!"

- Marysol N. Cerdeira, Co-Host/Producer - "Que Viva La Musica" WFDU 89.1 FM, 2018

“The Big 3 Palladium Orchestra, with its screaming horn section, frenzied rhythm section, and its high-octane, bone-crunching arrangements is, by far, the most hard-core tribute record I have heard in a long time. A guaranteed dance-club floor burner.”

- DJ Alert, The Big 3 Palladium Orchestra: Live At The Blue Note, Descarga.com, January 19, 2007

“The National Day Orchestra (El Día National de la Salsa) overwhelmingly confirms their crushing power during their jazz version of the mambo *Around the World* with Tito Rodríguez, Jr on timbales.”

- Jamie Torres Torres, Velada salsera con sabor a nostalgia, El Nuevo Día, March 20, 2006

“There were fiery solos from every section of the band.”

- Dave Conlin Read, Latin Jazz in (Tanglewood) Ozawa Hall, NewBerkshire.com, September 2, 2006

Reviews & Quotes

“Standouts include powerhouse renditions of *Que Bonito Es Puerto Rico!*, *Mama Guela*, *Mambo Inn*, *El Cayuco* and *Avísale a Mi Contario*.”

- Rudy Mangual, The Big 3 Palladium Orchestra: Live At The Blue Note, Latin Beat Magazine, October 2004

“The Big 3 Palladium Orchestra already may rank as the most brilliant large Latin jazz ensemble this side of Havana.”

- Howard Reich, Incendiary jazz takes the chill out of June, Chicago Tribune, June 16, 2003

“Trumpeters leaped to high notes as congas and timbales drove taut ensembles, while glitter-clad couples danced onstage and volunteers danced in the audience. Latin jazz was welcoming its first repertory orchestra, with no need for scholarly decorum.”

- Jon Pareles, 5 Groups in 6 Hours, From the 30's to the 90's , The New York Times, Monday August 13, 2001

“Tito Rodriguez Jr's show...was made for dancers.” “Mr. Rodriguez made the music lift off”. “Mr. Rodriguez occasionally uses older arrangements taken from his father, also a band leader, and they're sophisticated harmonically and structurally.”

“The best moments were when Sammy Gonzalez sang against the chorus and horns of the band.”

- Peter Watrous, In Performance • The New York Times, July 27, 1996

The Big 3 Palladium Orchestra: Live At the Blue Note

Date: October 2004 • Source: Latin Beat Magazine • Review by Rudy Mangual



THE BIG 3 PALLADIUM ORCHESTRA Live At the Blue Note (Rumba-Jams)

Following in the legacy of their superstar parents (Tito Rodriguez, Machito and Tito Puentes), Tito Rodriguez, Jr., Mario Grillo, Jr. and Tito Puentes, Jr. came together in 2001 to perform the music of the '50s Palladium era mambo. The brainchild of Mario Grillo, Jr., this rebirth of the music of the three giants continues to represent the big band sound and legendary music of the era of the Palladium nightclub.

With the help of musical director José Madera, Jr., as well as several original members from the Big 3 Palladium bands, the 23-member orchestra has been spreading the gospel of the mambo. The three sons alternate fronting the orchestra on timbal, as they serve up the repertoire of their fathers. This production was recorded live during a performance held at the prestigious New York City nightclub, The Blue Note, on March 6, 2004. The well-known engineer Jon Fausty was ably assisted by Jeff Hoffman. Featured vocalists include Hermán Olivera, Sammy González and Luisito Ayala.

Standouts include powerhouse renditions of *¡Que Bonito Es Puerto Rico!*, *Mama Guela*, *Mambo Inn*, *El Cayuco* and *Avisale a Mi Contrario*.



A bite from the apple - New York

Date: April, 2003 • Source: Latin Beat Magazine • Article by Vicki Sola

On January 12, a crowd packed midtown Manhattan's Club Babalú to witness a special showcase featuring The Big Three Palladium Orchestra, an orchestra comprised of alumni from the big bands of the three giants of Latin music: Frank "Machito" Grillo, Tito Puentes, and Tito Rodríguez.

When I asked Mario Grillo--son of the legendary Machito and leader of the present day Machito Orchestra--what led to the concept behind the creation of The Big Three Palladium Orchestra, he explained, "It was my idea to create the band, with the go-ahead from [Tito Puentes's widow] Margie Puentes, Tito Rodríguez, Jr., and Tito Puentes, Jr. The idea was to play the music of the three masters in a concert format."

The Club Babalú concert was, as Grillo accurately described it, "one and a half hour's worth of intense music," with the 24-piece orchestra, including five saxophones, four trumpets, three trombones and four rhythm section players, plus three timbaleros and three vocalists belting out the classics of "the three greats," one after another. They performed Machito's *Sambia*, *Mambo Inn*, *Babarabatiri* and *Oye La Rumba*; Tito Rodríguez's *Mama Guela*, *Chévere* and *El Mundo de Las Locas*, and Tito Puentes's *Cayuco*, *Complicación* and *Oye Como Vá*. Grillo cited these numbers as being "examples of the book." He added, "We have, combined, about 2,500 tunes we can play--about 250 albums. So we can play forever, if need be!"

The Big Three Palladium Orchestra's concerts so far include appearances at New York City's Verizon Festival with Abbey Lincoln, Philadelphia's Kimmel Center with Giovanni Hidalgo, New York's Belleaire Festival, the Concord Jazz Festival in California with Eddie Palmieri and Arturo Sandoval, and the Hollywood Bowl with Celia Cruz. Advertisement

Those experiencing the electrically charged evening conveyed to me that they were thrilled to watch the sons of "the three greats"--Mario Grillo, Tito Rodríguez, Jr., Tito Puentes, Jr. and Ronald Puentes--onstage performing the original charts. Those present who fell in love with the music during the '50s and '60s, when it swept America, and those who wished they had been born earlier and could have danced at the Palladium Ballroom, can attest mightily to the fact that this music is most definitely alive and well!

The New York Times In Performance

Date: July 27, 1996 • Source: The New York Times • Review by Peter Watrous

JAZZ Percussion-Driven Band Makes the Dancers Respond Tito Rodríguez Jr. S.O.B.'s

Tito Rodríguez Jr.'s show on Monday night was made for dancers, and they obliged by packing the floor. Mr. Rodríguez plays timbales, and much of the power of his Latin band comes directly from the percussion section.

Along with Chucky Lopez on bongos and Eddie Montavo on congas, Mr. Rodríguez made the music lift off. Mr. Rodríguez occasionally uses older arrangements taken from his father, also a band leader, and they're sophisticated harmonically and structurally. He and the other percussionists navigated the changes in each tune perfectly, and when the compositions moved into the improvised section, Mr. Lopez changed from bongos to metal bell.

Mr. Rodríguez was playing his own bell, and the two men made the music swing, the dark ping of the metal driving it. Mr. Lopez placed a samba rhythm over Mr. Rodríguez's pattern, producing funky, syncopated mesh.

The best moments were when Sammy González sang against the chorus and the horns of the band. He sang "Sun Sun Babae" and the hit "Mujer Erotica," where his pleas, presented as if life depended on a positive response, were followed by a cool chorus singing "Una mujer como tu es la que quiero yo" ("A woman like you is what I want"). Then he shouted, "Swing, swing!" and the dancers were off.





The Big 3 Palladium Orchestra

Date: January 19, 2007 • Source: Descarga.com • Review by DJ Alert

Editor's Pick:

You want swing? We'll give you swing, brother. The mega-mambo Palladium Orchestra is musically directed by José Madera. Madera, a Puente orchestra veteran, is joined here by the sons of Latin music big-band royalty: Tito Puente Jr., Machito Jr. (Mario Grillo), and Tito Rodriguez Jr. in what is not simply a marketing effort. These three men are all capable timbaleros, and this live recording from New York's Blue Note, March 6, 2004 tore down the house.

Playing the tunes that the three originals were famous for are heavy hitters like Louis Bauzo, Oscar Hernandez, Héctor Colón, Eddie Montalvo, Jerry Madera, and Chis Washburne to name a few. Most of the thirteen tracks are high voltage mambo-jazz instrumental tracks like "Cuban Fantasy," "Mambo Inn," and "Palladium Days." There are also tracks that require vocals like "El Cayuco," "Mama Guela," "Complicacion," and "Chevere." For these, the vocalists Luisita Ayala, Sammy Gonzalez, and Herman Olivera do a simply superb job.

There seems to be a resurgence, as of late, for the sounds generated by the bands of the '50s and '60s. The Big 3 Palladium Orchestra, with its screaming horn section, frenzied rhythm section, and its high-octane, bone-crunching arrangements is, by far, the most hard-core tribute record I have heard in a long time. A guaranteed dance-club floor burner. *DJ Alert. Very Highly recommended.*



The 2006 Tanglewood Jazz Festival opened, as usual, with an evening of Latin Jazz; a nice feature, which gives the Berkshire audience an opportunity to experience a type of music rarely presented hereabouts. It was a generous helping served up Friday night in Ozawa Hall, starting with The Spanish Harlem Orchestra (13 members), led by pianist and arranger Oscar Hernandez, and closing with the Big 3 Palladium Orchestra (20 members), led in turns by Machito, Jr, Tito Rodriguez, Jr, and Joe Madera, Jr.

Over the course of nearly four hours, a thoroughly satisfying musical sampler was delivered, broken up, unfortunately, by too much talking by the M.C. and the various band leaders, each of whom (except the relatively succinct Oscar Hernandez) failed to appreciate the audience's capacity to learn what they will about the history and development of the music and of the Big 3.

Both of these bands is comprised of stellar players and there was no shortage of star turns throughout the proceedings. Except for a couple of numbers, the S.H.O. was fronted by a trio of vocalists who doubled as dancers/cheerleaders/jesters, depending on the nature of the tune, much to the delight of the audience.

Hernandez, a gifted composer (and also Reuben Blade's musical director) directed his Grammy-winning band with a light touch and made sure all his players got into the game; all the solos were right on and were well-received, by audience and band member alike.

The Big 3 Palladium Orchestra was founded for the purpose of perpetuating the legends of Machito, Tito Rodriguez, and Tito Puente and their musical battles in New York's Palladium Ballroom dating back to the 1950s. Tonight's concert was touted as a "battle of the Latin big bands," but it didn't feel like a competition and we noticed no wagering among the audience.

The members of the B3PO are every bit as good as the SHO, but they're kept on a tighter rein and dressed in suits and ties, as was the norm in the 1950s. Despite the duds, the conga/bongo duo of Eddie Montalvo and Louis Bauzo were loose

Latin jazz in Ozawa Hall

NewBerkshire.com
Berkshires Arts Reviews & News

Date: September 2, 2006 • Source: NewBerkshire.com •
Review by Dave Conlin Read



and limber all night and there were fiery solos from every section of the band. The brass section included the diminutive Carmen Laboy, who coaxed some nasty growls from a baritone saxophone that's almost as tall as she is.

Saturday afternoon saw the return for the fifth consecutive year of Marian McPartland, with guest Elvis Costello, for a "live taping" of her NPR show "Piano Jazz." The longest-running and one of the most popular shows on public radio, it's no wonder this segment is always a big draw for the festival. But, one wonders how many people come a second time, because its novelty value far out-weighs its entertainment value. Kind of like watching sausage get made; the radio program is always an entertaining and edifying hour, but the "live taping" is usually an uncomfortably chopped-up two hours.

Nonetheless, Ms. McPartland, always warm and witty, is a global treasure, and a true pioneer deserving of all the accolades accorded her. And the loquacious Costello, with a demonstrated affinity for lovely ladies of jazz, was the perfect guest, providing plenty of charming badinage to smooth out the proceedings. And if the appearance of his wife had been known in advance, the audience could've been doubled.



Chicago Tribune

Incendiary jazz takes the chill out of June

Date: June 16, 2003 • Source: Chicago Tribune • Review by Howard Reich

MUSIC REVIEW.

Considering the temperature was low and the pavilion audience sparse, Saturday night's installment of Ravinia's Jazz in June series did not have a lot going for it.

Except for some of the most accomplished Latin jazz artists on the planet.

To note that the third night of Jazz in June was its best would be an extreme understatement. This was one of the most viscerally exciting performances in the decade-plus history of Ravinia's jazz mini-fest and a reminder of the remarkable artistic level that the Highland Park soiree can achieve.

In a three-attraction evening that had no weak points, the most thrilling music by far came from a sensational, relatively new band improbably called the Big 3 Palladium Orchestra.

One might not expect very much from any ensemble that has been playing for barely two years and is directed by not one but three leaders. Yet judging by Saturday night's incendiary (though technically disciplined) performance, the Big 3 Palladium Orchestra already may rank as the most brilliant large Latin jazz ensemble this side of Havana.

The fanciful title refers to New York's fabled Palladium Ballroom, which from the mid-1940s to the mid-'60s was a nexus for Afro-Caribbean music in the United States. Machito, Tito Puente and Tito Rodriguez were the "Big Three" bandleaders who gave the Palladium a large measure of its glory.

And their gifted sons recently joined forces to create an unusual ensemble specializing in repertoire of each of the three jazz legends.

If this sounds like a formula for disaster -- with three competing egos pushing different songbooks and agendas -- the op-posite proved to be the case. For Mario Grillo (Machito's son), Tito Rodriguez Jr. and Tito

Puente Jr. have staffed this ensemble with Latin dance-band veterans who can dispatch this repertoire more authoritatively than any younger group of musicians might hope to do.

Moreover, the idioms that this band explores -- from the "Cubop" orchestral showpieces of Machito to the medium-tempo mambo classics of Rodriguez to the orgiastic dance rhythms of Puente -- probably have not been so authentically expressed since the original bandleaders themselves were in their heyday.

From the outset, Grillo established the technical prowess, stylistic credibility and creative vitality of this group, for this ensemble (conceived by Grillo) addresses this music in fundamentally different ways than bands less steeped in the tradition.

For starters, Grillo and friends took pains to lay bare the layers of rhythm on which this music is built. Piano and percussion laid down the multiple "clave" patterns that more often than not these days are buried in a blur of orchestral sound.

With Grillo revisiting Machito's repertoire, the rhythmic impulses of this music rightly were placed at the forefront, just as it is to this day in ensembles in Cuba, where Machito grew up (he was born Frank Raul Grillo). And the tempos that the younger Grillo chose -- gently but inexorably pushing forward -- were ideally suited to this music.

When Rodriguez Jr. took over, the very character of the band seemed to change, with great brass choirs and florid, call-and-response vocals suddenly taking prominence.

To hear so many virtuoso instrumentalists and vocalists producing so much contrapuntal sound -- all of it propelled by extraordinarily seductive backbeats -- was to savor the splendor of this band.

If the young Puente enjoys re-creating his father's antics at timbales, the audience clearly welcomed the chance to revisit the spirit of the music of "El Rey" ("The King," as the elder Puente was known). Yet this was no nostalgia show, for the band once again reaffirmed the perpetual freshness and creative possibility of this music.

The New York Times

5 Groups in 6 Hours, From the 30's to the 90's

Date: August 13, 2001 • Source: The New York Times • Review by Jon Pareles



MUSIC REVIEW:

Musical eras flashed by and intermingled like happily jumbled memories at the Verizon Jazz Festival's finale, free concert Saturday afternoon on the Columbia University campus. The 1930's, 50's, 60's and 90's were all up for grabs as five first-rate groups appeared during the six-hour concert.

The concert opened and closed with big bands. The Magali Souriau Orchestra's pieces looked toward France, Gil Evans, Thelonious Monk and literature. Ms. Souriau's pieces, including one inspired by "Lord of the Rings" and another toying with the melody from Debussy's "Clair de Lune," created misty, closely harmonized textures from which tendrils of melodies emerged, sometimes entwining in quasi-classical canons.

The debut of the Big 3 Palladium Orchestra closed the concert. Mario Grillo (the son of Machito), Tito Rodriguez Jr. and Tito Puente Jr. took turns leading the big band in music by their fathers, dating as far back as Machito's and Mario Bauza's pioneering Latin-jazz hybrids from the 1930's. Trumpeters leaped to high notes as congas and timbales drove taut ensembles, while glitter-clad couples danced onstage and volunteers danced in the audience. Latin jazz was welcoming its first repertory orchestra, with no need for scholarly decorum.

The concert's generosity backfired. To stay on schedule, sets were cut short when equipment changes took longer than planned; Mr. Shorter's group had barely 40 minutes. A smaller lineup or an earlier start would have given the music some breathing room.



For those of you with graying hair, listening to music from almost half a century ago can bring back memories of better times. A time when going out dancing meant you had to be a good dancer and a time where, when you fell in love, you fell in love to the language of the Bolero.

From that era came *The Big 3* – Tito Rodríguez, Machito (Francisco Raúl Gutiérrez Grillo), and Tito Puente, who played together many times, until they each formed their own bands. Such were the afternoons and nights at the original, *Palladium Ballroom*, located 53rd Street and Broadway, New York, where each bandleader followed the other with his own orchestra.

That era has now been revived by the sons of Machito, Tito Puente and Tito Rodríguez, who grew up close to their parents – learning music before learning how to read and write.

It was Machito's son, Mario Grillo's idea, to put together a big band similar to the orchestras led by Tito Rodríguez and Tito Puente. Grillo approached the two Tito Jrs., and the orchestra became a reality. The main concept of *The Big 3 Palladium Orchestra* is to play their fathers' music.

The Orchestra is a big band comprised of 24 musicians: five saxophones, four trumpets, three trombones, a full rhythm section of four musicians, plus three timbaleros and three vocalists.

According to Grillo, in 2003, *The Big 3 Palladium Orchestra* – named after *The Big 3* – played at the *Club Babalú* for an hour and a half. During the marathon set, the orchestra played Machito's *Sambia*, *Mambo Inn*, *Babarabatiri* and *Oye la rumba*; Tito Rodríguez's, *Mama Guela*, *Chévere* and *El Mundo de las Locas*; and Tito

In time with The Big 3

Following the steps of Puente, Machito and Rodríguez

Date: 24 February 2007 • Publication: La Opinión, Espectáculos • Article by: Nelly Apaza Retamoso • Translation by: Ramón Muñiz Hernández

Puente's, *Cayuco*, *Complicación* and *Oye Como Va*.

“That was just a taste because we have 2,500 songs. That is, we can play forever, if we want to,” Machito's son asserted in an interview last year.

The orchestra, which has toured worldwide playing Mambo, Chachachá, Bolero and Latin Jazz, comes to Los Angeles for a solo concert at the Luckman Fine Arts Complex at the University of California.

The Big 3 Palladium Orchestra, which made its debut 3 years ago in New York, has developed. The original lineup of 24 musicians has been refined. The Big 3 is different because, according to Tito Rodríguez, Jr, Tito Puente, Jr has decided to pursue other musical opportunities. “He is into rap and hip hop. Mario Grillo and I have stayed with *The Big 3*.”

Unlike his father, Tito Rodríguez, Jr does not sing. He is the band's timbalero, one of the instruments that his father taught him to play as a boy during rehearsals at the Palladium Ballroom.

In 1975, Tito Rodríguez, Jr, the son of *El Inolvidable* (*The Unforgettable*), made his first recording for the *TR Records*, a label owned by *El Inolvidable* himself. “*Curious?* Was my first tropical music album. The singer was José *El Canario* Alberto, with Rubén Blades and Adalberto Santiago on backup vocals. *Sabor Criollo* was the first song that José Alberto recorded in the United States,” recalls Rodríguez.

Twenty years after his debut, Rodríguez took up the timbales professionally and decided to form his own orchestra. Married and needing to support his family, Tito Rodríguez Jr. made a living at CBS network as a programs editor. “My work on television is also part of what I learned from my father. In Puerto Rico he used to do

programs for television and I was one of his camera men”.

Tito was urged to start playing his father's music because of the resurgence in Mambo due to the movie,

The Mambo Kings', popularity. “Then I got a call from the *TTH* label to record the album *Eclipse*. This time the vocals were done by Sammy González, Jr. The hit from this album was *Mujer Erótica*, a song composed by Sammy. The album is still getting airplay today,” notes Tito.

In 2003, Mario Grillo and Tito Rodríguez Jr. joined forces. “Mario called me to form a big band to play the hits that our fathers made famous at the *Palladium*. I liked the idea and decided to stay in the orchestra with the music of my father, Tito Puente and Machito”.

It's not unlike swimming against the current of today's rhythms: hip-hop, reggaetón, pop ballads and all forms of tropical musical that have developed during these decades. “The people that supported my father for many years remember that era. Many of them say that they got married listening to the boleros of Tito Rodríguez. And the young crowd that comes to our concerts also wants to learn from them”.

Tito Jr. knows that is not easy to book a big band. “The big band era is dying, but these arrangements that we play have been the standards for three decades and a good song with a good arrangement never dies. The music that they did was ahead of their time. And, yes, it is difficult to travel with twenty-three, but we want to maintain the sound of the big band, it has no equal.”

As a side note, Tito Rodríguez, Jr plans on recording annually now under his own label, *TRJR Records*, to continue the musical legacy his father left him. Look for a new Tito Rodríguez, Jr CD soon!



A Legacy of Passionate Latin Dance Music

Latin Business Magazine, Summer/Fall 2008

There are many occupations that, while they put beans of the table and keep a roof over your head, don't exactly instill much enthusiasm in their practitioners. Bandleader is not one of those professions. And if you're a bandleader whose father was a legendary singer and bandleader, the fires of professional passion can be downright incendiary.

So it is with Tito Rodriguez, Jr., son of Pablo Tito Rodriguez, dubbed the Frank Sinatra of tropical music. His scintillating rhythms had legions of fans swaying and swirling to the intoxicating big band Latin beat before and after the WWII era.

Tito Jr. surrounded by everything and everyone musical from birth, developed an interest in playing drums by age nine. Although he explored several musical instruments during his teens, including guitar, piano and vibes, he soon gravitated to the timbales. Tito then, at his father's insistence, pursued a formal music education at the Berklee College of Music and the University of Miami's Department of Music.

While only in his early twenties, Tito organized his first band, the Tito Rodriguez II Orchestra, which led to his production and recording of *Curious*, an album that has recently been re-issued on CD and is considered a Latin classic.

Today Tito Rodriguez, Jr. carries his father's music, as well as his own songs and arrangements to throngs of enthralled listeners and dancers around the world. His

mission is to impart a love for his signature mambo refrains, introducing it to current and future generations. To anyone who has every attended a Tito Rodriguez, Jr. performance, there can be little doubt that his exuberant, Caribbean-derived cadence is worthy of musical immortality.

What were your early childhood years in New York like, growing up with a music legend for a father?



Our house was always full of music. I knew from all of Dad's records and awards in the house that he was someone special, but to me, he was just Dad. My earliest memory is when I was seven and listening to my Dad rehearse his orchestra in our basement and then suddenly we were at the Palladium Ballroom in NYC. To encourage my interest in music, my parents bought me a drum set when I was about 8 years old. By the time I was nine, Dad had me working endorsing Bustelo coffee. I was part of a passionate, hard working family.

Because of who my father was, I also had the opportunity to meet a lot of entertainers and sports figures, such as Roberto Clemente, Orlando Cepeda, Chi Chi Rodriguez, Jose Ferrer, Sammy Davis, Jr. Tony Bennett, Flip Wilson, Delta Reese, and Dione Warwick to name a few.

I have two favorite memories of celebrities. One time Orlando Cepeda came over to our house for dinner. We had time to kill before dinner so he took me and my friends out into the street and played catch with us. I was definitely the hero of the neighborhood for a while.

Golf lessons from the master, Chi Chi Rodriguez, also stands out. He was a great teacher and a real joker. He had me in stitches on the range. The only downside to Dad being famous was that my Dad had to travel to four and he was away from all of us for long stretches of time. We really missed him.

Did you always take it for granted that you would follow your father into a musical career, or did that realization develop gradually?

I never took it for granted. My love of music just evolved naturally over time. By the time I was sixteen, music began to spark my interest. Dad said if I was serious about music, then I had to have a formal music education before he would even consider allowing me to play with him and his orchestra. There were no free rides. This prompted me to study at Berklee College of Music and the University of Miami where I graduated with a BA in Music.

In your teens you studied Guitar, Piano, Vibes and Timbales. Do you play multiple instruments in your performances today?

No, professionally I only play the timbales and occasionally sing background. Today I am primarily the orchestra leader/timbale player. The music does not require me to play other instruments. I do enjoy playing the guitar in my spare time.

Your father insisted on you pursuing a formal musical education, rather than a totally self-taught approach. Do you feel that resulted in a more solid musical foundation for your musical development?

Yes, absolutely. I learned all aspects of writing music, harmony, theory, arranging, and melody improvisation.

Without a formal education, I would not be able to do all of the things I do today, arrange, produce, write, and perform.

Tell us about your first band, The Tito Rodriguez II Orchestra, and how it came to be.

My father had just died and my Mother came to me with the idea of doing a record. My sister and her husband were running Dad's label, TR Records. To pique people's interest, Mom suggested the name *Curious*? At the time, I knew Ruben Blades.

We played soccer together in Central Park. He was with Fania singing and composing. I met with Ruben and other songwriters and put the album together. The lead singer was Jose Alberto, El Canario. In addition, Adalberto Santiago was on Coro along with Ruben. The album sold over 50,000 copies in Africa alone. In Latin music, sales over 50,000 units is considered a gold record. We had a winner on our first try.

You have been involved, in several capacities, with some of the top Latin musical talent spanning the '60s to the '90s. Who were a few of the most memorable standouts?

Performing with Celia Cruz at the Hollywood Bowl really stands out. It was one of her last performances. Little did I know she was very ill. She put on a great performance and was one of the last great classic Latin performers. The performance at Carnegie Hall with Gilberto Santa Rosa was also very memorable. As an artist it is one of the greatest venues to perform in, so I am very proud of that.

Composing the theme song for Sally Jessy Raphael's show was my first experience as a writer/arranger for a nationally televised TV production. Loved it. Would love to do more of this type of work. It was a great collaboration between artists.

In 2002, you, along with Mario Grillo and Tito Puento, Jr., formed The Big 3 Palladium Orchestra. Tell us about the concept behind it and its enduring success.

The concept was originally Mario's. He came to me and asked me if I would co-lead the orchestra with him. The idea was to continue to play traditional Mambo Music with a big band. Between the three of us we have over 2,500 original charts from our fathers. We love the music and love exposing it to a younger generation. For example,



some of them know Luis Miguel's version of Tu Me Delirio, but how many of them have heard my father's recording of it with the London Symphony Orchestra?

In 2004 we recorded The Big Three Palladium Orchestra, Live at the Bluenote in NYC. This propelled us onto the international stage and now we are touring all over the world. We have been privileged to perform at such spectacular venues as Tanglewood, the Hollywood Bowl, the Pori Jazz Festival, the Istanbul Jazz Festival and Jazz at Vienne France Festival.

Why in 2006, did you decide to start your own, independent Latin recording label, TRJR Records.

We want to be in total control of every aspect of the product from start to finish. The idea is an album a year for me and to also write and arrange music. We want to sign new artists, produce their albums and support their development. We are currently in discussions now with a major independent label to distribute our products.

Do young Latinos readily embrace your music? An elegantly dressed, 18-23 piece Latin Big Band would seem a world apart from the contemporary, 'Here today, Gone tomorrow' Rock scene.

Generally, we dress for the venue. If it is a huge outdoor festival like Pori Jazz festival with a crowd of over 20,000 we are all in T-shirts and jeans. If it is a very elegant venue, we are in suits or tuxedos. An elegantly dressed 18-23-piece orchestra is merely icing on the cake to music that continues to rock. What we have found is that great danceable music withstands the test of time and appeals to everyone, especially the younger generation. They are all over this music. It is very alive and well.

You wear many musical hats: Band leader, Musician, Composer, and Arranger. Are all of these aspects of the business equally fulfilling for you?

Being a bandleader definitely has its ups and downs. Trying to please eighteen people is not always possible, matter how hard you try. Being a musician on the road today is not so glamorous either with travel being so difficult. Writing and arranging are very fulfilling because I am creating something new. That said, performing is a great rush. When you see that everyone is really enjoying the music, it makes me feel very fulfilled, that all of the inherent problems associated with the music business are irrelevant. It is the fans and their love of the music that makes it all worthwhile.

Do you prefer performing at Dance Clubs, where you can see your music come alive in the dancer or are Concerts just as rewarding?

I really enjoy performing at dance clubs. It is great to see people perform the intricate synchronized Mambo dance moves. There is sensuality to the movement of the dance and watching the dancers energizes the band and takes to a higher level. We feed off each other. The more they are into the music, the more we are into it as performers.

As far as concerts go, the audience members always find place in the isles to dance to the music. It is very hard to sit still while this riveting music is being performed. So matter where I am performing people get up and dance.

Many musicians of your caliber collaborate with musical instrument makers to create their ideal sound. Have you developed, perhaps, with Toca Percussion, any special "tweaks" in your quest for tonal nirvana?

I have suggested to TOCA in the past to come out with a timbale that has the cascara sound of the vintage Leedy Ludwig timbales of the '50s. The shell of the drum had a rich sound to it. The current Proline timbales that I perform with for TOCA have the closest sound to those drums in my opinion.

You've toured all over the world. Do you have any favourite venues?

Yes, Istanbul Turkey was one of my favorite venues. We played in front of a tobacco factory ruin that was lined with a glass building.

Turkey is a visual feast, with the ancient and modern juxtaposed. To be in a country with over 4,000 years of history, where east/west cultures and all the major religions have collided, was a great experience. To learn that the people of Istanbul not only knew the music but also know how to dance the Mambo in its purest form was a shock to me.

There I realized how very universal this music is and loved by all no matter what faith, ethnic group or country you are from. Music is a universal language that reminds us of what we have in common with each other. During these difficult times, music reminds us of our humanity

Your father was from Puerto Rico. Do you have any strong ties there as well, either familial, professional or both?

Yes, I have very strong ties in Puerto Rico. I recently formed the Tito Rodriguez Orchestra there, which plays my father's original charts. It has always been my dream to form an orchestra using musicians from the island. This past February my dream became a reality. I also have many friends on the island and vacationing there with my family is something I really enjoy.

Do you have any hobbies or other pursuits that help you relax and unwind periodically?

Golf, scuba diving, yachting, cooking and entertaining family and friends at home in NYC are great ways to unwind, just recently I played golf at Palmas Del Mar and also at Chi Chi Rodriguez's El Legado Golf Resort. Chi Chi was there and after a round of golf we discussed doing a fundraiser together to raise monies for a children's hospital on the island.

It must give you great satisfaction and pride to be able to carry the torch of your father's music to today's generation and beyond.

It is an honor to play his music and to introduce his music to a younger fan base. In addition, because he died so young, he was not able to take his music to Europe and

Asia. This is a privilege for me' I hope this music catches fire in a younger generation so it lives forever.

Your music has a strong grounding in 'tradition' with contemporary interpretations. Do you find that it is constantly evolving, even if subtly?

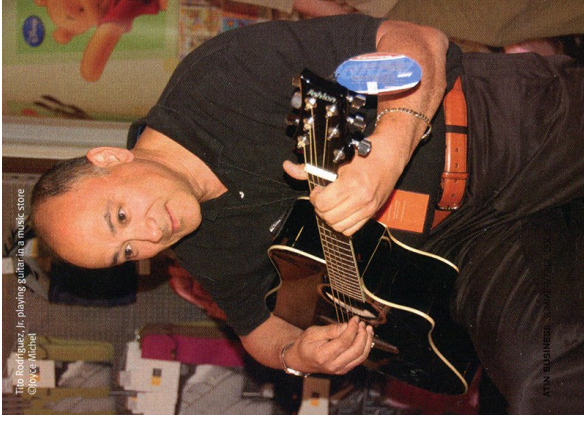
My music from is constantly evolving. I always gear my music for the dancer so that it is completely danceable whether it has a Latin Jazz sound or a Mambo sound. My music is first and foremost for the dancer' Playing my father's original charts continues to evolve as well The music sounds contemporary because the rhythm section has a more modern, contemporary sound. That sets the tone and the music is instantly updated.

What advice would you give to young musicians who want to enter the field of traditional Latin music?

First and foremost, get a good music education. Study the history of our music and the players who created it such as Perez Prado, Machito, Tito Puente, Eddie Palmerie, Celia Cruz, and of course, my Dad' Have a vision, follow it, and never give up no matter what anyone says' Reach for the stars. They are out there.

In closing, is there a particular piece of your music that occupies a special place in your heart as your all-time favourite?

It is hard for me to pick an all-time favorite. When I am working on a new tune, that tune becomes my favorite, for that period of time. After it is recorded, I seem to let it go. I am always searching for inspiration for my next song and enjoy working to make it a reality.



Tito Rodriguez, Jr. playing guitar on a music store
© Roy & Michel

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