

Aguabella

Regarding the journey of the important Cuban percussionist Francisco Aguabella

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Francisco Aguabella has become an authentic living legend of Latin jazz thanks to his tireless and brilliant work as a percussionist since the 1950's. Native to Matanzas, he emigrated from Cuba in 1957. Since then he has continued the productive tradition of other brilliant percussionists, such as Chano Pozo, Patato Valdés, Tata Güines and Mongo Santamaría.

In his work, Maestro Aguabella fuses the rhythms and traditional “palos” of the African-based music with the diverse genres of Cuban music, adding a *smooth jazz-soul* component to this blend. Additionally, the sound of his band is known for having an exceptionally potent rhythm base while at the same time overflowing his music with sensual melodic hues. This is how specialists within the CUBOP genre tend to classify Aguabella's jazz. CUBOP is the record label that Aguabella signed on with during his initial stay in New York thanks to the influence of the great musician Dizzy Gillespie.

From his early attachment to percussion instruments of African origin, Aguabella not only masters the “tumbadoras” (drums), but also plays the “batá” drums brilliantly, which can be confirmed by his friends. These friends usually invite him to participate in Santería ceremonies in Los Angeles, where he has lived

for decades. In 2003, he recorded the album *Canto a los Orishas*, where he pours out his talent as a supreme percussionist. [As mentioned earlier,] Aguabella has had the privilege of playing with high caliber musicians such as Dizzi Gillespie, Tito Puente, Eddie Palmieri, Frank Sinatra, Weather Report, Lalo Schiffrin, Machito and Carlos Santana, among others.

In the first half of the 1970's Aguabella was part of the Malo group led by the guitarist Carlos Santana. Many may remember a great hit by Malo called *Suavecito* (softly), which was played into the ground by radio stations such as WQAM and WQBS, which could be received in Havana during those years.





Aguabella was awarded the National Heritage Award and he currently is a visiting professor in the Department of Ethnomusicology at UCLA, where he teaches Afro Cuban music. He also plays in his group, the Aguabella Latin Jazz Ensemble.

Aguabella's group sounds like a one-man band. Between the rhythmic and melodic sections, he succeeds in articulating a formidable polyphony which is as notable for the strength of its percussion as it is for the virtuosity and ability to improvise with the instruments that accompany the Cuban musician. The most known songs of the 1999 *Agua de Cuba* CD include *Watermelon Man*, by Herbie Hancock, *Long, Long Summer*, by Lalo Schiffrin, *Here, There and Everywhere*, by Lennon and McCartney, and the legendary *Manteca*, which was immortalized by Chano Pozo and

Gillespie. In addition, the album *Salsa Latina* and the song which has the same name as the title of the album, were both adopted by Aguabella.

In *Cubacán*, released in 2002, another detail specific to Aguabella's work can be appreciated, which is the variety of genres that he cultivates and moulds into all of his records. *Cubacán* is a jewel by all accounts. The hottest themes are *Guajira Pa'los Pollos*, by the Puerto Rican Papo Lucca; *Felukin*, which is played in the environment of the Cuban "timba"; the Afro *Tin Tin Deó*, by Chano Pozo, and *Agua Limpia Tó*, by Aguabella himself. Very interesting counterpoints between the rhythmic sections and wind instruments can be appreciated in this album, where syncopation is the true key to the sounds. On their own, the animated beats



of the metallic instruments top one another in feverish improvisations.

In his last album released in 2004, *Ochimini*, Maestro Aguabella continues his creative line, which combines the most authentic roots of Latin jazz with classic songs and composers, in other words, the oldest with the most novel. This record includes diverse genres, such as guaguancó, cha-cha-chá fused with funky, ballad, and a lucumí song to the Orishas. A song written by Cole Porter, is executed with the palpitating and passionate style of a band of musicians from the west coast which emulates the Greatest Congo Player in the area of metals. As a purely passive listening experience, it provides intense listening

pleasure, but it does much more motivating people to dance until they drop.

In summary, the quality and strength of Aguabella's music is high octane, Latin jazz in the hardest and purest style conceivable by this genre, while always coddling the melody. His music is highly recommended. It transmits rich abundance and is a pleasure to the senses which turns him into one of the greatest Cuban creators of our Diaspora.