

Mike Freeman

ZonaVibe



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LINER NOTES: Back when Tito Puente used to roll his vibes into the Palladium theater, people would say “Here comes Tito with those venetian blinds!” Though known most widely as a timbale player, Puente also recorded some great hits on vibes. Four of the tracks presented here were written for Tito: “Those Venetian Blinds,” “Mambo Kings,” “Night Crawlers,” and “Qué Tal, Tío”

When Bobby Hutcherson passed away while I was working on this project, I decided there had to be some music for him here as well. I have a stack of homemade cassette tapes of Bobby’s music that I listened to nonstop on long road trips when I was in college. Three of the tracks here reach for that Hutcherson sound and were written for him: “Clutch the Hutch,” “Bobby Land,” and “House of Vibes.”

The remaining tunes are a family affair. “Fancy Free” was written just after my daughter’s first birthday and I’ve been wanting to record it ever since. My son was responsible for “What’s Up With This Moon?” It’s a direct quote from a video he texted me one night when he was out with some friends. “Mister Snacky” is just one of those nicknames I can’t seem to shake (healthy snacks, of course!). –Mike Freeman, February 2018

A huge thanks to the musician’s for their fantastic contributions on this recording! The all new line-up presented here includes Guido Gonzalez who I know from working with Ray Mantilla. Roberto Quintero I first met over ten years ago working with Lucho Cueto’s all-star group Black Sugar. Bassist Ian Stewart and drummer Joel Mateo are first rate young players making their mark.

Vibraphonist and composer, Mike Freeman, has been entrenched in the New York jazz and Latin music scene for over three decades. With spirited soulful swing, his performances have taken him from North America and Europe to the Azores, Caribbean, and South America. His seven recordings of original music (ranging from jazz, Latinjazz, salsa, Brazilian, fusion, and R&B) have gained national and international attention and received extensive radio airplay charting on jazz, contemporary jazz, and World Music radio. “Blue Tjade”, a tip of the hat to Cal Tjader, is followed by the latest in a line of clave infused recordings Mike has produced, “Venetian Blinds”. This latest release features music for El Rey (The King) Tito Puente and NEA Jazz Master Bobby Hutcherson.

Past performance highlights for Mike as a leader include the Trinidad & Tobago Steelpan & Jazz Festival; Festival Internacional (Tercera, Azores); Central Park’s Harlem Meer concert series in New York City; performing for Flood Relief in Des Moines, Iowa; Joslyn Art Museum’s Jazz on the Green in Omaha, NE; the Berks, Rehoboth Beach, Hennessy Greenwich Village, and JVC Newport (at Saratoga) jazz festivals; International Association of Jazz Educators (IAJE) Convention, as well as an extensive tour of Portugal, cosponsored by the Fulbright Foundation and the American Embassy (USIA), where he received the Medal of the City of Guarda.

Other endeavors include producing “Band Together2” a benefit concert for musicians affected by hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria (Puerto Rico in particular) with proceeds going to the Jazz Foundation of America and “Band Together” a Hurricane Katrina Benefit Concert for the Tipitinas Foundation benefiting New Orleans-area musicians. Mike wrote a series, spanning more than a decade, of commissioned compositions and arrangements for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra’s Percussion Scholarship Program and in 2014 was commissioned by the late drummer/educator Ed Uribe to write arrangements for a national percussion curriculum for China that were performed by members of the Shanghai Symphony at Shanghai Symphony Hall.

Mike is also widely known for his work and recordings with several acclaimed Latin groups. The vibes behind the name, his has worked extensively with legendary percussionist Ray Mantilla’s Good Vibrations Band, which toured Italy far and wide. Ray’s latest cd “High Voltage” includes Mike, and “Good Vibrations” (both on Savant Records) was Jazzweek’s top Latinjazz recording on radio, 2006. He was part of Lucho Cueto’s all-star group Black Sugar, “Estamos Azucar”, which gave blockbuster performances for thousands at the Toros Y Salsa Festival in Dax, France, and at the Festival Internacional de Salsa in Lima, Peru. For fifteen years he been a member of Jose Mangual Jr.’s Son Boricua featuring the late Jimmy Sabater (one of the architects of Boogaloo) that performed for large gatherings at salsa congresses in New York, L.A., and Atlanta. His vibe work can also be heard on recordings with Mark Holen’s eclectic Latin blues band Zambomba. In the 1990’s he was often heard in New York with Jorge Jimenez’s salsa group Timba Vibes, having created the groups book. This was followed by an over 15 year association with salsa singer Julio Salgado. He performed with the Spanish Harlem Orchestra (directed by Oscar Hernandez) at Madison Square Garden and with Willie Villegas’s Joe Cuba Sextet for New Jersey’s salsa congress both with legendary sonero Cheo Feliciano.

“Latin jazz doesn’t get any better than this” –Mark Sullivan, Allaboutjazz