

“Azucar Pa' Ti”--Eddie Palmieri (1965)

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Essay by Steven Loza (guest post)*



Eddie Palmieri

Eddie Palmieri (b. 1936) was a product of the many Puerto Ricans in New York, and along the East Coast, who have so closely identified with both Cuban and US jazz that have played such an important role in the crystallization of the hybrid salsa movement internationally, but especially in the Latin quarters of the United States. Lyrics sung in Spanish over a strong dance base have been fostered by a significantly growing US population whose Caribbean, Chicano/Mexican, and Central and South American composition continually enhances the Latino nature of the music.

Additionally, as articulated by Max Salazar in so many of his writings, Latin music served as a catalyst for racial integration, with the Palladium Ballroom in New York City, where Palmieri performed extensively along with artists such as Machito, Tito Puente, and Tito Rodriguez, becoming a metaphor for the interaction of not only diverse Latinos but also dancers and musicians of Italian, Jewish, African American, and Anglo-American descent along with so many other heritages. With an ever-growing multicultural awareness and the constant development of hybrid forms of expression within the United States, salsa has, for many, provided a mode of cultural expression that bridges and cures many intercultural conflicts and barriers. Its growth continues internationally.

Eddie Palmieri thus became one of the major contemporary artists of Latin music based in New York City. Although he was highly active in the 1960s, when he led the innovative charanga-styled group Conjunto La Perfecta, it was during the 1970s that Palmieri made a great impact on the salsa and Latin jazz scenes, emerging as an innovative pianist-composer-arranger who dynamically experimented with the blending of progressive Latin Caribbean forms and contemporary jazz shadings. Palmieri's piano style, for example, often reflected the style of the then highly influential McCoy Tyner, who was associated primarily with the progressive jazz styles of the period. Classic albums recorded by Palmieri and featuring numerous first-rate Latin and jazz musicians have included “The Sun of Latin Music” (1974), “Unfinished Masterpiece” (1975), and “Arete” (1995).

He has been awarded nine Grammys. Palmieri first started to gain wide recognition with his Conjunto La Perfecta, which he formed in 1961, and which was characterized by a Cuban charanga style but with trombones. In 1965, the ensemble recorded the LP “Azucar pa' ti” on the Tico label, produced by Teddy Reig, and considered by many to be the definitive Eddie Palmieri recording during his early days with La Perfecta. The album was later released in 2007

on the Fania label.

Featuring the original version of “Oyelo que te conviene” (recorded nine years later on Palmieri’s “Sun of Latin Music” LP and featuring lead vocalist Lalo Rodriguez) and the popular dance mambo “Azucar,” the LP features trombonist Barry Rodgers, Manny Oquendo on timbales and bongos, and lead vocalist Ismael Quintana. “Azucar,” representing the live performance, *descarga* (jam session) style of Palmieri, has a recorded duration of more than eight minutes.

The other notable tracks among the seven on the album include: “Solo pensar en ti,” featuring Rogers and Quintana; “Mi sonsito,” a cha cha featuring Oquendo on timbales and Quintana’s creative soneos (vocal improvisations); “Cuidate Compay,” another cha cha featuring Palmieri on piano in addition to a flute solo; the *masacote* “Los cueros me llaman,” featuring Oquendo, Rogers, and Rodriguez; and a final cha cha, “Tema del Apolo.”

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