

JAZZIZ

Alfredo Rodríguez
Sounds of Space
(Mack Avenue)

To the list of young jazz musicians who have left Cuba of late, add a spectacular talent in the form of 26-year-old pianist Alfredo Rodríguez. His entire first release, *Sounds of Space*, is the work of an advanced jazz improviser and composer. Classically trained in Havana conservatories, Rodríguez, played the Montreux Jazz Festival in 2006, which is when Quincy Jones first heard him. Jones has since mentored Rodríguez and coproduced this record of 11 originals written and arranged by the younger musician. *Sounds of Space* shows a soloist and songwriter less defined by the clave and more by clean, inventive runs with a drop of dissonance, using Thelonious Monk and Bud Powell as models.

Rodríguez opens “Qbafrica” with a quick piano introduction to the theme, followed with his accompaniment on melodica. Rodríguez’s rhythm section alternates bassists Gaston Joya and Peter Slavov, and drummers Michael Olivera or Francisco Mela. Ernesto Vega plays soprano sax and clarinets. Often, Rodríguez’s writing leans to movement-pieces and complex, dramatic solos, with limited chord comping. The few ballads here are wistful and as structurally multifaceted as his uptempo songs. “Cu-bop” is a nimble Monk-via-Havana romp, with near-blues and funkier flourishes, and tempo changes. “Transculturation” uses a like-minded structure, which is Rodríguez’s signature throughout the record: state an intriguing melody briefly, extended and inventive soloing for the majority of the piece, return to the melody line. The melody and structure of “Crossing the Border,” again echo “Qbafrica” yet the unaccompanied piano phrasings (after a quick habanera quote) show a clearer Classical approach, and operatic dynamics. The concerto-like “...Y Bailaria la Negra?” is dedicated to Cuban songwriting legend Ernesto Lecuona, but has more in common stylistically with Chick Corea (without the blues inflections) than a Cuban dance orchestra.

—John Radanovich

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