

Renaissance Man Review



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Purchasing Info!

A 1960s Revelation - Mark Weinstein's Cuban Roots

Originally released in 1967 on Musicor, **Mark Weinstein's** classic "*Cuban Roots*" with his **Cosa Nueva Orchestra** has at long last been re-issued on CD by Catalogue Music, laboriously restored and remastered from the best available vinyl discs as the original master was long lost. As a bonus, Weinstein's equally striking "*The Orisha Suite*" of 1976/7 is also included on this CD re-issue. Again, the original master was long lost and "*The Orisha Suite*" was remastered from a second generation dub.

The quality of both remasters is astonishing, especially so in the case of "**Cuban Roots**". The entire album had been recorded in a single three hour session in a tiny studio, and all tracks are first complete takes. Even the original Musicor release was not of the greatest technical quality and in fact rather harsh-sounding, and an early re-release on Ariola suffered from a flawed pressing and fuzzy sound. With the current CD re-issue, "**Cuban Roots**" can be heard far better and far more cleanly than ever before. Don't expect the perfection of a modern digital recording, or even of a remaster from an original analogue high quality master, though. This would be plainly impossible to achieve. But the quality is still very, very good indeed and a real joy, especially if you've ever heard the vinyl releases (let alone an audio cassette release).

Dedicated Afro-Cuban/Latin jazz aficionados will not need reminding what a momentous event the release of **Mark Weinstein's "Cuban Roots"** was back in 1967 and why it almost instantly acquired legendary and even cult status. "**Cuban Roots**" represented an epic revelation. Never before had Cuban folk and especially Santeria rhythms been heard outside the boundaries of Cuban folk music. The complexity and sophistication of these rhythms came almost as a shock in the jazz world. **Mark Weinstein's "Cuban Roots"** was - **is!** - as mind-blowing as few albums before or since. Despite a distinct lack of critical acclaim at the time, the reputation of "**Cuban Roots**" spread rapidly through the ranks of Afro-Cuban jazz devotees on both sides of the Atlantic. As the album was never widely available (at any rate on this side of the pond), musicians and connoisseurs alike would often gather around whomever was fortunate enough to have a copy to listen to this amazing revolutionary recording. The popular excitement "**Cuban Roots**" generated was quite extraordinary. The original release quickly became a prized collectible and today probably is one of the most collectible vinyls on the planet, while even the Ariola re-release is quite sought-after and you'd probably have to be incredibly lucky to find one.

Having in the intervening years switched from trombone to flute, **Mark Weinstein** recorded the equally striking "**The Orisha Suite**" in 1976/7. This too generated a lot of popular excitement and quickly attracted its own near cult following among Afro-Cuban jazz aficionados. Even today, **Mark Weinstein's "The Orisha Suite"** has to rank as especially some of the finest and most exciting Afro-Cuban jazz flute ever.

So much for the historical background of these groundbreaking recordings.

In addition to the sophisticated complex Afro-Cuban rhythms, the equal complexity of the ensemble writing and playing on **Mark Weinstein's "Cuban Roots"** also stands out. The great spontaneity of this recording is given a further edge by the fact that it was based on a single full band rehearsal. Weinstein's crisp hard-edged trombone hardly stops playing, alternating between improvs and playing the second voice in the arranged responses mainly owing to the lack of a second trombonist. In addition to Weinstein, the band is comprised of a formidable array of luminaries. **Mario Rivera** on bari, then with **Tito Puente**, held the horns together. **Arnie Lawrence** on alto was picked on the strength of his prowess as a mambo dancer and his innate timing. A young **Chick Corea**, apparently somewhat bewildered at the rehearsal, on the cusp of his stint with **Miles Davis** shows much of the panache and style for which he was soon to become renowned. **Julito Callazo**, **Tommy Lopez** and **Papaito** from **Sonora Matencera**, already giants, here played together for the first time, and **Papiro** played conga on at least two of the tracks. Congas substituted for bata drums as the latter's use in a secular setting was at the time considered sacrilegious. Bassist **Bobby Valentin**, known for his great musical open-mindedness, and **Kako** on bell and palitos completed the line-up.

The opener of **Mark Weinstein's "Cuban Roots"**, "**Malanga**", kicks the album off with an instantly riveting beat and complex and almost fierce improvs from Weinstein's edgy trombone and Lawrence's alto. Lennon and McCartney's "**Michelle**" is a brilliant arrangement that must have served as the template for many a subsequent horn-based version, though the driving as well as driven percussion here has never been approached elsewhere. "**Ochosi-Om-Mi**" is lyrical, an irresistible groove, with tasty as-if-in-a-dream like improvs. Things approach fever-pitch with "**Chango**", the hypnotic beats of the

percussion driving on the horns, the improvs soaring to ever greater heights of invention. "*Ochun*" is perhaps the most light-hearted of the pieces, a happy, irresistible groove that practically forces you to jump up and dance - after all, this music, these rhythms, are meant to be danced to. **Mark Weinstein's** trombone and **Chick Corea's** ivories are especially driving and provide fine improvs - this is young Corea at his finest, rising to the challenge thrown up by Weinstein. An original Weinstein composition, "*Just Another Guajira*" continues in a happy vein, like a mambo on steroids. "*El Desenganado de los Roncos*" is at once very lyrical and incredibly complex, the ensemble playing is out of this world, as indeed are the improvs. "*Cuban Roots*" closes with "*El Barracon*", a driving piece, feverish, ecstatic. Even after nearly forty years, **Mark Weinstein's** "*Cuban Roots*" still sounds fresh and exciting and still delights and surprises. I still discover something new with every listen, and not only because of the cleaned-up nature of this re-issue.

As previously noted, in the years between "*Cuban Roots*" and "*The Orisha Suite*" **Mark Weinstein** had changed from trombone to flute, and we hear him on this and on marimba on the latter. He is joined by another top-flight line-up that includes **Julito Collazo** from the previous recording but now on bata and chekere, the objections to the use of the bata in secular settings having fallen away. Likewise on bata and chekere are **Steve Berrios** and **Flaquito**. The sensuous lead vocals are provided by **Olympia Alfara**, and **Eddie Martinez** and **Steve Palitz** provide keyboards and guitar, respectively. Palitz also co-wrote the pieces on which he plays with Weinstein. The arrangements are every bit as complex and elegant as those of "*Cuban Roots*", the concept and music as exciting and original. However, "*The Orisha Suite*" was conceived and performed as an offering to the female spirit, and the greater lyricism of this recording reflects this superbly. **Mark Weinstein's** "*The Orisha Suite*" is feminine, soft, gentle, sensuous, whimsical, sometimes wistful, while also firmly rooted on the ground, in the earth.

"*The Orisha Suite*" opens with "*Sensualidad*", a joyful celebration of the feminine spirit and, as the title might indicate, sensuality. **Mark Weinstein's** flute dances and sings sensuously, deliciously above the layered keyboards and guitar and marimba, like a maiden dancing in the gentle sunshine of a forest clearing, her bare feet hardly touching the ground. "*Ochun*" introduces the seductive lead vocals of **Olympia Alfara**, who also leads the chorus, set off beautifully by an ethereal keyboard, grounded by the earthy beat. Sensuous and exciting, "*Recuerdos de Amor*" is both whimsical and wistful, the French horn providing solid grounding for Weinstein's Debussy-esque (*L'Après Midi d'un Faune*, among others, often comes to mind here) flights of fancy. "*Yamaya*" sees the return of the delights of **Olympia Alfara's** vocals with a firmly down-to-earth song full of complex ensemble work and equally complex harmonies and dissonances that enhance the great charm of this number. The beat and feel turns more feverish with "*Dando Luz*", a hot and steamy sensuality prevails, there is an earthy-sensuous smell of sweat in the air, **Mark Weinstein's** flute is frenzied, frantic, impassioned. All too soon, the closer of **Mark Weinstein's** "*The Orisha Suite*" is reached with "*Recuerdos de Amor - reprise*", with Weinstein's flute here staying closer to the ground, though still both whimsical and wistful. Like "*Cuban Roots*", "*The Orisha Suite*" has withstood the test of time well, very well.

Either of these two albums alone would be worth the price of admission. Getting both on a single CD re-issue makes for a double delight. As availability curiously doesn't seem wide-spread, and quantities may well be limited, I'd suggest grabbing the CD re-issue of **Mark Weinstein's** "*Cuban Roots*" while you can and before it too turns into another prized, hard to find collectible.

This music is still as exciting and sensational as ever, and it would not be going too far to suggest that if you haven't heard at least "*Cuban Roots*", you haven't really heard Afro-Cuban jazz. Way beyond essential, the CD re-issue of **Mark Weinstein's** "*Cuban Roots*" with "*The Orisha Suite*" should be in any Afro-Cuban/Latin jazz and indeed any modern jazz collection.

Track List:

Cuban Roots

1. Malanga (Rumba Columbia) - 6:20
2. Michelle (Rumba Abierta) (Lennon/McCartney) - 2:57
3. Ochosi-Om-Mi (Afro) - 3:42
4. Chango (Nanigo) - 4:50
5. Ochun (Rumba Illeca) - 3:45
6. Just Another Guajira (Guajira) (M. Weinstein) - 3:15
7. El Desenganado de los Roncos (Guaguanco) - 5:36
8. El Barracon (Comparsa) - 4:00

The Orisha Suite

(Composed and arranged by Mark Weinstein)

9. Sensualidad - 2:51
 10. Ochun - 3:47
 11. Recuerdos de Amor - 5:04
 12. Yamaya - 3:30
 13. Dando Luz - 2:14
 14. Recuerdos de Amor - reprise - 3:23
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Credits:

Cuban Roots:

Mark Weinstein - trombone
Arnie Lawrence - alto sax
Mario Rivera - baritone sax
Chick Corea - piano
Bobby Valentin - bass
Kako - bell and palito
Julito Collazo - conga and bass drum
Tommy Lopez - conga drum
Papaito - conga drum
Papiro - conga drum

The Orisha Suite:

Mark Weinstein - flute and marimba
Eddie Martinez - keyboards
Steve Palitz - guitar
Julito Collazo - bata and chekere
Steve Berrios - bata and chekere
Flaquito - bata and chekere
Olympia Alfara - lead vocals
unknown - chorus
unknown - french horn and cello

PURCHASING INFO:

Cuban Roots can be purchased:

Direct from the [artist](#)

Most major CD stores?

From [Jewish Music Distribution](#) UK

From [Hatikvah Music International](#) (US)