

# **CARIBBEAN JAZZ PROJECT JOINS THE AFRO BOP ALLIANCE IN A POWERFUL LATIN JAZZ COLLABORATION**

## **New Recording Features Big Band Arrangements Of Classic CJP Tracks**

The Caribbean Jazz Project, the Latin jazz collective of vibraphonist David Samuels, steel pan drummer Andy Narell and saxophonist Paquito d’Rivera, crafted their first recordings on Heads Up International in the 1990s and immediately captured the imagination of audiences and critics worldwide. In the years since, the GRAMMY® Award winning ensemble CJP led by Samuels has recorded subsequent albums on the Concord label and a few of the faces in the group’s roster have changed. Nevertheless, Samuels and company continue to explore and test the commonly accepted boundaries of Latin jazz – and jazz in general – via innovative compositions and exciting arrangements.

The *Caribbean Jazz Project-Afro Bop Alliance*, set for worldwide release on Heads Up International (HUCD 3137) on March 25, 2008, recasts nine CJP signature pieces – some by Samuels and others by Coltrane, Monk and other jazz luminaries – in a fresh new light via full-bodied arrangements by the Maryland-based Afro Bop Alliance, one of the most exciting new bands on the Latin jazz scene today. Since their inception less than five years ago, the brassy and high-energy Afro Bop Alliance has electrified audiences at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the Smithsonian Jazz Café, The W. C. Handy Jazz Festival and many other music and cultural festivals.

The genesis of the project was more organic than top-down conceptual, says Samuels, who first encountered the Afro Bop Alliance a few years ago and enlisted trombonist Dan Drew to rearrange some CJP tunes originally written for the small group setting. “Dan very cleverly and artfully took these songs and orchestrated them for big band,” says Samuels. “Then I thought, ‘Why don’t we try to record this and see what happens?’ So the whole idea evolved from the music outward, as opposed to the concept coming before the music.”

The results were eye-opening, even for the musician who composed the original pieces. “Repackaging something that had been played a lot in a smaller group was a way to see it and hear it in a new light,” says Samuels. “You react differently to it. It’s a different ball game. It’s the difference between playing on a five-man team and a fifteen-man team. And if you’re the listener, you may have heard these tunes with the small group, but it’s a completely different experience hearing it with this big band.”

The set opens with light-hearted and energetic “Rendezvous,” a composition penned by Samuels that originally appeared on *The Gathering* (2002). The Afro Bop horns bring a level of energy that complements yet never crowds the CJP rhythm section of bassist Max Murray drummer Joe McCarthy and percussionist Roberto Quintero.

The followup track is a breezy but solid rendition of Coltrane's classic "Naima," with a horn and vibe counterpoint that moves the piece along toward a coda that eventually stretches the limits of melody and percussion to the limits of tonality and rhythm.

Further in, "Picture Frame" showcases Samuel's vibe virtuosity from the opening measures, positioning him in the midst of a luscious horn arrangement that maximizes the potential of both voices.

In the final stretch, "Afro Green" opens with a mysterious sounding marimba/percussion mix that underscores a majestic horn arrangement, then segues into a more traditional jazz groove. The closer is an intriguing rendition of Monk's well-known "Bemsha Swing" that – like "Naima" several tracks earlier – takes the jazz classic beyond its traditional moorings into a more experimental realm.

While the *Caribbean Jazz Project - Afro Bop Alliance* clearly reaches for the bigger sound, none of the original CJP nuance or subtlety is lost in the more layered and elaborate big band context. Their trademark groove is just as edgy and innovative as earlier incarnations – perhaps more so in many respects.

"The level of creativity is not defined by the borders or the lack of borders," says Samuels. "The creativity comes in the vocabulary of the artists who are playing the music. You create music not by reading the notes on the page, but rather by reinterpreting the notes and giving them an emotional quality – just like an actor does with lines of dialogue. The process of keeping the notes alive comes from the musician imbuing them with some kind of emotion, some kind of attitude, something that is evocative and personal."

Join the alliance. The Caribbean Jazz Project is on the move, and the direction is always forward.