



**Rising Star Drummer Francisco Méla
Releases His Second Album,
Cirio: Live at the Blue Note (Half Note Records)**

**Album Inspired By His Father, Cirio,
Whose Portrait He Painted As a Pre-Teen
And Graces the Album Cover**



It's no secret that for most of the 20th Century, Cuban music and musicians played important roles in influencing and revitalizing North American popular culture. From Ernesto Lecuona and Desi Arnaz to Chano Pozo, Paquito D'Rivera and Gloria Estefan, a wide stylistic panorama, from classical to pop and jazz idioms, has been constantly invigorated by the presence of supremely talented Cuban musicians and their distinctive music traditions.

Half Note Records will release *Cirio* (Sept. 23), Francisco Mela's first live record and second recording as a leader. The Cuban-born drummer assembles a superior cast of playmates - **Jason Moran, Lionel Loueke, Mark Turner and Larry Grenadier** - for this live recording captured at the **Blue Note Club** in New York City. Together they make music informed by the rhythms of Mela's homeland, while also going beyond into adventurous modern jazz. In the process, he evinces a versatility rare among young players; his interactions with different combinations of group members underscore his collaborative instincts.

His debut release, *Melao* (AYVA Musica) which The Village Voice called the best debut by a jazz artist in 2006 (in the newspaper's first annual jazz critics poll), included luminaries such as Joe Lovano, George Garzone, Jane Bunnett, Anat Cohen and Lionel Loueke. Since then, Mela has increasingly become one of the most talked about and in-demand drummers on the scene in New York and beyond. He is currently a favorite among elite jazz instrumentalists such as Joe Lovano (Us Five), John Scofield (John Scofield Trio), Joanne Brackeen and as a regular member of Kenny Barron's working trio, all of whom cite his charisma, sophistication, and life-affirming spirit.

He brings to this impassioned performance compositions inspired by family - his recently departed father Cirio as well as his newborn son (the portrait of his father, Cirio, on the cover of the album was drawn by Mela as a pre-teen).

Biography

Born in 1968 in Bayamo, Cuba, Francisco was pointed in the direction of music at an early age by his father, who was artistic director of cultural programs in this historic town nestled in the Sierra Maestra Mountain range. "When I was a little kid, we had a guitar in our home," he recalls, "and my dad tried to get me interested, but I never really got into it." Rather, he pursued an interest in painting and spent three years in the local Escuela de Artes Plásticas (School of Plastic Arts).

Then, the 15-year old headed off to Havana to attend a festival, not realizing that he was missing the final exam and would be expelled from the institution. Unfazed, he switched gears and enrolled in the town's El Yare music school, taking classes in classical and Afro-Cuban percussion. Francisco then changed roles, becoming an instructor at Bayamo's Rafael Cabrera Conservatory of Music. At the same time, he furthered his education, earning a degree in music and percussion from the Centro Nacional de Superación de la Enseñanza Artística (CENSEA, the National School of Arts for Teachers).

A trip to Havana brought the young drummer into contact with famed Cuban jazz pianist Emiliano Salvador and an opportunity to perform with his Nueva Visión quartet. "Going from Bayamo to Havana would be like going from Hartford to New York City," Francisco recalls. "You say, 'Wow, this is a great city! I want to make it here!'" While in Havana, he was also employed at Havana's famed national dance school, the training ground for some of the world's finest ballet artists, playing Afro-Cuban batá drums for dancers learning folkloric routines. In pianist Gabriel Hernández's group, he performed at the Jazz Plaza festival, organized by none other than Jesús "Chucho" Valdés, Cuba's legendary jazz pianist, bandleader and composer.

His first opportunity to perform outside of Cuba came when Hernández was booked for an appearance at the Cancún Jazz Festival. In 1997, Francisco returned to Mexico to perform in Cancún with his own group, the MelaSon Latin Jazz Band. Then, a chance encounter with Panamanian jazz pianist Danilo Pérez led him to a life-changing decision. "Danilo encouraged me to move to Boston," Francisco reminisces. "He said, 'Don't worry. if you come to Boston, you're going to end up playing with better people than me.'"

He initially planned to study at either Berklee College or The New England Conservatory of Music, but professional opportunities headed him in another direction. It wasn't long before Francisco was the house drummer of Wally's Café, one of Boston's hottest jazz clubs. While honing his own sound as a jazz drummer and broadening his leadership role as leader of a quintet, he also had an opportunity to back such world class talent as Pérez, fellow Cuban Gonzalo Rubalcaba, and his longtime idol, drummer Roy Haynes.

Eventually, he started playing with music professors at Berklee. Then, one day, he received a call to teach at the prestigious institution. He currently balances a hectic schedule of appearances with pianist Kenny Barron, saxophonists Joe Lovano and George Garzone, bassist John Patitucci, guitarist John Scofield and many other noted leaders.

Francisco's professional and artistic horizons continue to broaden as he collaborates with more and more musicians - especially musicians like Turner, Moran, Loueke and Grenadier on *Cirio*, who represent the here and now as well as the future of the music.

WHAT THE CRITICS ARE SAYING:

"One of the most important Cuban drummers in jazz."

- *JazzTimes*

"Mr. Mela is a bandleader on the rise."

- *The New York Times*

Francisco Mela & Friends will perform in support of *Cirio* at The Blue Note Club in New York City on release day, September 23rd and September 24th.

RELEASE DATE: September 23 (HN 4536)

TOUR DATES:

Sept. 23 -24 The Blue Note, New York City
feat. Jason Moran, piano; Peter Bernstein, guitar; Armando Gola, bass; Javier Bercher, saxophone. Sets at 8:00 pm & 10:30 pm

October 17 w/ Kenny Barron - Clayton College, Morrow, GA

October 25 w/ Kenny Barron - DaCamera Society, Houston, TX

November 7 - w/ Joe Lovano's Us Five - Hill Auditorium, Ann Arbor, MI

November 11-16 w/ Joe Lovano's Us Five - Village Vanguard, NYC

November 21 w/ Joe Lovano's Us Five - Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, CT

For more information on Francisco Mela, please contact
Don Lucoff at DL Media - don@jazzpublicity.com / 610.667.0501

Francisco Mela's website:
<http://www.franciscomela.com>