

My Songo Music: Yours, Mine, and of Van Van

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Cultural heritage of the nation should be named the song of Van Van. Anyone doubting it, can play the latest record production to any young man, in the entire Island and take a seat (if he can stay seated) to see how he dances and enjoys it. Music made decades ago, but with no expiration date. When you add one to fifty years, Van Van returns to his greatest hits and proposes songs like El Buey Cansao, Sandunguera or Azúcar, but it also reminds the troubadour Juan Formell was in a beautiful song they share with Silvio Rodríguez or the rhythm is mixed with urban genre vibes and continues to be the locomotive, the authentic locomotive of Cuban music. About Mi songo, the album they've just presented with Egrem record label, we talked with Samuel Formell.

**Is the album including anthological songs with new arrangements?**

We always really try to make the same arrangements that were before, not to change the harmonic, rhythmic side, what happens is that we contribute a bit more for the evolution of the music, in the case of keyboards, for example, which weren't present back then, today's recordings, which give you a little more quality than when it was recorded for the first time, we provided a chorus, which is valid, but generally we never stopped doing what was effectively a real success, which it is the song and its arrangement.

**I guess these songs bring back many memories and emotions, do you have any especial song?**

Really, all the songs make me remember a lot, but being my father's composition, I think the Popurrit, because it includes songs from a time which started when I was just a child and today I see children singing those songs. I had the experience of crying together with my father at Karl Marx Theater with La Colmenita when they paid tribute to Van Van and, well, there's a special song and when I hear it, it makes me remember and brings tears, it's the one recorded with Silvio, "Through my Songs", because this song was always listened at home played on the guitar, it was like a family anthem in the jamming sessions where my father sang his songs like Este amor que se Muere, songs he composed at one point for Elena Burke, Omara and this was part of them, but it was never really recorded in a record production and even less thinking that it was accompanied by a piano, with Silvio Rodríguez, it was a song that my father only sang at home. I think this one moved me more than anything, for hearing his voice, for what the lyrics says and the harmony, for the ways in which he takes you to a place where the lyrics plus the melody make you cry.

**Although it's not usual in Van Van's albums, it has several guests. How much do they contribute and how did you select them?**

They contributed a lot, maybe too much. Regarding the picking, I think it's an intuition, something that's really complicated, in this case, for example, in *El Buey Cansado* features Telmary, who can rap, within that time, because it's not a fast song, but she can bend time, she can make use of her skills, she is a great rapper, a great musician. My father had her in a very high esteem, for him Telmary was the best rapper in Cuba and one of the best in the world and that's one of the reasons why she is here as a guest artist; like Silvio, who was my father's brother. El Misha, who is another urban musician, was more like on his request: if you are making an album, please invite me, I would like to record *Azúcar*. Of course I also think he is one of the important urban artists in Cuba and he also loves Van Van. In the case of Alexander Abreu, well, it was logical that he had to be there and Gilberto Santa Rosa, we also had this long due chance to record a song with Van Van and we seized the opportunity, because I believe that internationally he is a very respected artist, he is successful and he is friends with all the Van Van Band.

**Is Van Van always going to return, in some way, to these great hits from other times of the orchestra?**

Yes, as a matter of fact we are doing it already. We have been doing almost four or five tracks from the 70's and 80's, I think it was valid, because those songs are fresh, my father wrote them and without realizing it, they were already ahead of their time. Like in the case of *Popurrit*, which has a large range of harmonics, back in the day my father had a lot of influence from North American and Brazilian music and I think he started mixing rock and roll and stuff, all this together with something new that appeared.

**As for new songs, what does Van Van bring us?**

Of course we will continue to make new songs. In the next Van Van production, anthological songs will always be included, but most of them are new songs. There's an album scheduled for the middle of the year, with songs written by me, Robertson, Liebre. The same thing we did with the *Fantasia y legado* album, those were a hit, well that's what we are working on right now. Before that we are doing some things online that last 40 to 50 minutes, which we worked with RTV, and it's going to be uploaded soon, we are going to do one more with Pedrito Calvo, Pupy, El Tosco musicians who were part of the history of Van Van.

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