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**Juan de Marcos and the Afro-Cuban All Stars Launch U.S. Tour on April 29**

**20 Years After His Groundbreaking Recording Sessions for Buena Vista Social Club, Musician, Composer and Arranger Juan de Marcos Keeps Cuba’s Music Front and Center**

**Spring 2016 Tour Includes Concerts at BB Kings in New York, along with Boston, Philadelphia, Washington DC, Atlanta, and East Coast Festivals**

*“Dazzling musicianship and charm” – ALL ABOUT JAZZ*

<b>Juan de Marcos and the Afro-Cuban All Stars -- US tour 2016</b>			
<b>Fri</b>	<b>April 29</b>	<b>Port Washington, NY</b>	<b>Landmark Theatre</b>
<b>Sat</b>	<b>April 30</b>	<b>South Orange, NJ</b>	<b>SOPAC</b>
<b>Sun</b>	<b>May 1</b>	<b>Tarrytown, NY</b>	<b>Tarrytown Music Hall</b>
<b>Tues</b>	<b>May 3</b>	<b>Norfolk, VA</b>	<b>Virginia Arts Festival</b>
<b>Thurs</b>	<b>May 5</b>	<b>Washington, DC</b>	<b>Howard Theater</b>
<b>Fri</b>	<b>May 6</b>	<b>New York, NY</b>	<b>BB Kings</b>
<b>Sat</b>	<b>May 7</b>	<b>Philadelphia, PA</b>	<b>Annenberg Center</b>
<b>Sun</b>	<b>May 8</b>	<b>Boston, MA</b>	<b>Berklee Perf Center</b>
<b>Fri</b>	<b>May 13</b>	<b>Atlanta, GA</b>	<b>Variety Playhouse</b>
<b>Sat</b>	<b>May 14</b>	<b>Black Mountain, NC</b>	<b>LEAF Festival</b>
<b>Sat</b>	<b>June 4</b>	<b>Providence, RI</b>	<b>PVD Festival</b>
<b>Sun</b>	<b>June 5</b>	<b>Burlington, VT</b>	<b>Burlington Discover Jazz Fest</b>

Twenty years is a lifetime in popular music. Yet the impact of *Buena Vista Social Club*, *The Afro-Cuban All Stars’ A Toda Cuba Le Gusta* and *Introducing Ruben González*, three albums recorded by a small independent label with a modest budget in Havana in two weeks in March and April of 1996, can still be felt. Those recordings helped reintroduce the classic sound of popular Cuban music to the world, transcending long-standing, and by then already obsolete, political prohibitions and anticipating the re-establishment of relations between the two countries by two decades. In the process, it also made global stars of a group of old but brilliant musicians, some of whom had been forgotten even back in Cuba.

The musical director of those sessions was **Juan de Marcos González**, Grammy-winning composer, arranger, producer, bandleader, entrepreneur and *tres* player. “The Quincy Jones of Cuban music,” as *Songlines*, the authoritative world music magazine, once dubbed him.

Much has happened to González since.

Last year, he conducted a [semester-long residency at the Art Institute at the University of Wisconsin - Madison](#) — all while also continuing to tour and record with his Afro-Cuban All Stars. Over the years, the band evolved from an ensemble showcasing musicians from older generations to a combination of youth and experience. And while the Cuban music tradition remains the core of his work, González, who splits his time between Mexico, the United States and Cuba, continues incorporating new elements to his music, be it working with rappers as part of his program in Wisconsin, or adding to his ensemble non-standard instruments in Afro-Cuban music such as vibraphone and bass clarinet, performed by daughters Glicería, a classical pianist and orchestra conductor, and Laura Lydia, respectively. Rounding up the family presence in the band, Glicería Abreu, González's wife, contributes Afro-Cuban percussion and also acts as the band's general manager.

Discussing the anniversary of the Buena Vista Social Club sessions, González still sounds surprised at their impact: “We never thought that recordings made for cultural reasons might have any relevance commercially.”

“The idea of those sessions was to pay tribute to the creators and the sound of Cuban music in the 1950s, what I consider the golden age of Cuban music,” says, González, once a rocker who was kicked out of the Havana Conservatory after two years for being “a bit undisciplined.”

After that, he didn't think he was going to dedicate himself to music. And his father Marcos, a singer and player who had worked with several groups including the great Arsenio Rodríguez' Septeto Boston, wasn't keen on the idea of his son being a professional musician. “He wanted me to be in a ‘real’ profession. He wanted me to be an engineer, a doctor or a lawyer, “ he said. “And I wanted to please him.”

González (Havana, 1954) studied at the Universidad Agraria de La Habana, graduating as an Agricultural Engineer in 1980. For the next ten years he was in the faculty of the university, wrote science books and did research. But music was never far. He also finished his studies on guitar and Cuban *tres* at the Ignacio Cervantes Conservatory and took a course on orchestration and conducting at Goldsmith College in London. As a youngster, González had listened to and played rock — “something that was not well seen those days,” he notes. He remembers playing covers of groups such as King Crimson, Cream, Creedence Clearwater Revival, Jethro Tull and Yes. Still, “despite my passion for rock and R & B, I also listened to a lot of Cuban classics.” In 1976, while at the university, he decided to form a group “that would break all the established canons.”

**Sierra Maestra** was a band dedicated to recreating the sound of traditional Cuban music and the old, classic septets. “ It was a pretty ‘punk’ thing to do, getting a group of young kids to play *son*,” he once said. “And from then on, we started to play Cuban music.”

And yet, González continued his academic career, working on his thesis and receiving a Ph.D in Agricultural Engineering from the Gidromeliorativny Institute (“a sort of MIT of engineering,” he notes), Moscow, Russia, in 1990. In March that year, his father died. “Three months later, I was working in music full time, “ he says.

As it turned out, Sierra Maestra not only deeply reconnected him to the great tradition but, improbably, led to the *Buena Vista Social Club* recordings.

In the 1990s, González found in Nick Gold, founder and president of World Circuit, a small London-based label, an interested and enterprising partner. The success of Sierra Maestra's *Dundunbanza*, one of the best world music recordings of that decade, released by Gold's company, opened the door to an even more ambitious project.

González's initial idea was to record two albums: one utilizing the Cuban big band format with period orchestrations, which became **The Afro-Cuban All Stars' A Toda Cuba Le Gusta**. The other was going to be an acoustic recording, "a tribute to the Cuban music of the 1930s and 40s, evoking the sound of Eastern Cuba, more laid back." The album, produced by guitarist Ry Cooder, who also played in it, was eventually named after one of the songs selected: **Buena Vista Social Club**. And then, as the project progressed, "everybody fell in love with the playing of Rubén González, and because we had a little extra money, we could record him too. I wrote the arrangements right there in the studio." A pianist with a rich musical history, González was by then retired. He didn't even own a piano. The unplanned CD, **Introducing Ruben González**, became a best seller.

For Juan de Marcos, the Havana sessions were not just a musical but a personal project. That music was partly a tribute to his father and to those great musicians who created it and kept it alive, such as Francisco Repilado, better known as **Compay Segundo**. But these were not just names in a music history book. The exceptional but nearly forgotten González was his uncle and Compay Segundo was an old family friend and, for nearly 40 years, his next-door neighbor.

"I used to go to Compay's house all the time. The first guitar my father bought me as a kid he bought it from Compay. It was an *old* guitar," he says, chuckling at the memory. "After his wife died he didn't have anybody to make him coffee so in the morning, when he was up, he would knock on the wall to let my mother know and she would prepare him coffee. And when it was ready, she would knock on the wall and they would come out to the balconies, which were side by side, and he would get his coffee and they would chat."

Of that extraordinary music and those deep personal relationships, a global hit was made.

"I believe those recordings are the best-selling albums by Cuban artists – except for Gloria Estefan ... and she is pop," he says. "Recordings of traditional Cuban music, selling 12 million copies worldwide? Unthinkable."

"And inside the country, those recordings reminded a young generation of Cubans of our musical history," he says, proudly. "Many young artists and groups, hip hop bands, rappers, began to incorporate traditional elements to their music. Unfortunately, for political reasons, Cuban music lost its place in the marketplace for many years. But that wealth of music is still there. And with the Afro-Cuban All Stars we try to present it all. Our concerts are a tour of Cuban music through all its genres and its history. For me, all genres are valid. I make no distinctions. It's all one Cuban music." [April 2016]

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***"González has probably done more than any other person to bring traditional Cuban music to audiences outside the island." -- MIAMI HERALD***

***"Whenever musicologists study the colorful sounds of the Cuban diaspora, it's nearly impossible for them not to mention Juan de Marcos González and his Afro-Cuban All Stars" – VILLAGE VOICE***

**WEBSITE:** <http://afrocubanallstarsonline.com/eng/>

**VIDEO: LIVE ON KPLU SEATTLE** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ayKsqYLvE0g>

**VIDEO: LIVE IN JAPAN (full concert)** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bZ2mJehaNbE>