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QUIQUE TALAVERA

Borinquen's Master Drummer

By Rudy Mangual

The trendsetting music and entertainment industry on the island of Puerto Rico has been the envy of Latin America since the establishment of the U.S. embargo against Cuba. All forms of media (from radio to television), as well as the live entertainment in all of the major hotels and resorts throughout the island, are geared to assuring the highest level of professionalism to local residents and visiting tourists year round. The top performers of Latin America and North America travel to Puerto Rico, performing for television and radio shows, and are also featured at many of the island's major hotels.

Joining the elite of the island's musical institutions that includes names such as El Gran Combo de Puerto Rico, La Sonora Ponceña, Lito Peña y La Panamericana, Willie Rosario, Roberto Roena, Lucisita Benitez, Chucho Avellanet, Cheo Feliciano, Gilberto Santa Rosa and Victor Manuelle is drummer/percussionist/bandleader Quique Talavera.

Born in Santurce, Puerto Rico, Enrique Talavera's inclination towards music started on his 13th birthday, when he was given a set of toy drums by his parents, Miguel Talavera and Ángela Cruz. That same year he purchased a set of timbales with savings earned from his newspaper route in the area of Puerto Nuevo. After numerous complaints

from the neighbors about the noise generated by his daily drumming sessions, Talavera's father was forced to build him a soundproof room to rehearse in. His neighbors, as well as his parents, were equally happy with this new rehearsal room for different reasons, and the youngster continued banging his drums. During this period of the early 1960s, the sounds of Lito Peña and his Orquesta Panamericana and the Mario Ortiz Orchestra basically ruled the local music scene on the island. These became Talavera's early influences, along with the more contemporary, percussive sounds of Tito Puente and Rafael Cortijo, who frequently performed at the popular "Fiesta Musical del Mediodía" (a live, daily musical program recorded for WKAQ Radio in the city of Miramar), which Talavera frequented. But it was a performance by the Tito Rodríguez Orchestra at El Escambrón (a popular beach resort of San Juan) in the summer of 1962 that mesmerized Talavera and further inspired him to become a musician.

By 1964, at the age of 16, after working with several local conjuntos, Talavera was given the opportunity to join the ranks of a bonafide working orchestra, that of Pilo Suárez, playing timbal and drumset. It was during this period that he also became serious about pursuing a music career and started taking classes in theory, fundamentals and piano. Next he joined La Orquesta Ingenieria, which was mostly composed of students from the Engineering School of Mayagüez and the orchestra of Moncho



Usera, before joining, in 1968, the band of organist Mickey Juarbe, who was performing nightly at the Hotel Flamboyán and later on at the San Jerónimo Hilton (currently known as El Condado Plaza).

In a recent interview, Talavera emphasized that from 1965 to as late as 1985, there was a very high volume of opportunities for musicians and bands in Puerto Rico to perform nightly at the hotel shows that changed weekly, featuring international and local acts like The Temptations, Raphael, The Fifth Dimension and Lucেসita Benitez. Plenty of work opportunities were also generated by Puerto Rican television, which featured live orchestras backing all the performing artists on a nightly basis. There was enough work for everyone. At least a half dozen drummers worked steadily (five to six nights per week), including the popular Walter Rodríguez (the number one on-call drummer in PR at the time and Tito Rodríguez's favorite), Walfredo de los Reyes, Monchito Muñoz, Quique Talavera, and a young Alex Acuña, among others.

In 1970, Talavera moved on to Club La Concha (at La Concha Hotel) with the trio of Atilio Bruni, and the following year, he joined Pijuán y su Sexteto (performing at the Caribe Hilton Hotel). At the same time, during the day and on some nights, Talavera was the drummer for the housebands of the television shows of Mirta Silva, Tribuna del Arte (of Don Rafael Quiñones Vidal), Show Goya, Show Corona, and the popular Noche de Gala. In spite of his hectic schedule, he also found time to copy

charts for some of the popular arrangers of the times, like Ray Santos, Elías Lopes, René Hernández, Julio Gutierrez, and Mandy Vizoso (who Talavera considers his teacher and mentor). Vizoso always emphasized to Talavera the importance of being a completely trained and educated musician. He told Talavera to develop his skills as a professional show drummer with the capacity to compose and arrange his own music and that of others. Talavera commented to me that during 1969 that he copied all the musical charts used in "The Tito Rodríguez Show," televised on WRIC TV-Channel 7 in Puerto Rico for an entire year.

In 1972, Talavera organized his own orchestra with the purpose of accompanying the singer Sophy (who had just relocated to Puerto Rico after recording two albums in New York City with the Tito Puente Orchestra). During the 1970s, he also worked with musical director Pedro Rivera-Toledo in productions for Lucésita Benitez and Danny Rivera (two of Puerto Rico's top vocalists). Talavera's career as a musical director took off with the debut presentation of Sophy at the Club Caribe (of the Caribe Hilton Hotel) in 1974. After that, he went on to direct and arrange several recordings and presentations in Puerto Rico for the international group "Flor de Loto," from 1975 to 1978. He also worked as musical director and arranger for the television program "Show de Carmita" (Carmita Jiménez) on WKVM-Channel 11, from 1976 to 1978. Then Talavera became the musical director of Venezuelan superstar

At a time in which big bands are merely memories of the past, the Quique Talavera Orchestra still produces and delivers today the powerful sounds of the big bands of the forties and fifties with his talented 14-piece orchestra.

José Luis Rodríguez (El Puma) from June of 1978 to November of 1981, handling all of his presentations in the United States, Mexico, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and other Central and South American nations. After almost four years of extensive touring with El Puma, Talavera decided to spend four months in Guayaquil, Ecuador, with some of the members of his touring band, recording several albums while accompanying local

Raymond Torres y Richie Ray” and the final reunion concert of the group Menudo with the Symphonic Orchestra.

Enjoying a musical career throughout five decades, Talavera has performed with just about everyone in Puerto Rico and the neighboring islands. He has arranged, directed and recorded in 45 album productions accompanying artists such as Cheo Feliciano, Yolandita Monge,



artists.

Upon returning to Puerto Rico in 1982, Talavera started working with singer Julio Ángel and the Trio Los Condes until September of 1983, when he assumed the musical direction of the houseband of the Club Caribe. It was during this period that Talavera and this amazing orchestra performed six nights per week, accompanying Marco Antonio Muñiz, Lucésita, Iris Chacón, The Fifth Dimension, Chita Rivera, and Danny Rivera, among many other stars. The Club Caribe was the last venue in Puerto Rico to maintain the format of a true “Supper Club” from its opening in 1949 until closing its doors in May, 1988. The room featured a luxurious dance room that served dinner and a live show, six nights per week, all year long. A combo played for dancing, while the house orchestra accompanied the floorshow.

From 1983 to the present, the Quique Talavera Orchestra has accompanied the Mexican superstar Marco Antonio Muñiz in all of his presentations in Puerto Rico. Talavera also made arrangements for pop recitals by the Puerto Rico Symphonic Orchestra, including “Salsa Sinfónica con

Armando Manzanero, Chucho Avellanet, Sophy, Ednita Nazario, Tony Croatto, and Trio Boriquen, among many others. He has composed and produced over 100 jingles for commercial radio and television ads for clients like 7Up, Johnnie Walker, Budweiser, Café Crema, Goodyear, and Cruz Azul of Puerto Rico.

Since 1995, Talavera’s orchestra has been accompanying the “Chucho Avellanet Show,” thus becoming the longest working orchestra in the history of Puerto Rican television.

Currently, the Quique Talavera Orchestra features 12 musicians and two lead vocalists, Titi and Edward Delgado. The orchestra conducts about 100 presentations per year and is one of the most sought-after bands for conventions and special events throughout the island due to the wide variety of its repertoire. Talavera’s 2005 CD *En Plena Navidad* has been one of the holiday season’s favorite recordings in Puerto Rico for the past two years. Quique Talavera’s latest project finds him producing and moderating a radio program called “Músicos, artistas y cantantes,” aired every Monday, from 6 to 7 pm by 11 Q-1140 AM Radio in Puerto Rico. ■