



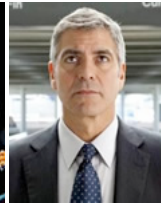
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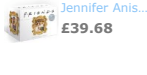
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Elly Roberts reviews

Orquesta Buena Vista Social Club

at Venue Cymru, Llandudno

Sunday 1st November, 2009



Live at Carnegie Hall: Buy from amazon.co.uk

Rating: 8/10

0 Comments

The brand plays on... with plenty of spirit.

Had it not been for the bright sparks at World Circuit in 1996, and some help from Ry Cooder, this band wouldn't have even played this gig.

In just over two weeks in 1996 World Circuit recorded three albums in Havana Cuba - Afro Cuban All Stars - A Tode Cuba le Gusta, Introducing...Ruben Gonzalez and finally Grammy winning Buena Vista Social Club.

Not even World Circuit could have predicted the impact the latter would have, selling in excess of 8 million copies, the success of the Wim Wenders film, and the live BVSC at Carnegie Hall released eventually in 2008.

Many of the original 'stars' from the 1997 album and following Carnegie Hall live album have passed -on. Seven are now dead including Compay Segundo, Ruben Gonzalez, and Ibrahim Ferrer. Some have retired or doing their own thing, but we're still left with two originals Barbarito Torres and Manuel 'Guajiro' Mirabal and an array of accomplished musicians, enough to re-create that wonderful album.

As part of their extensive autumn 19 date UK tour, the 13-piece band warmed up a chilly night on the north Wales



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coast, at Llandudno's plush Venue Cymru. It was almost a surreal show - warm Caribbean grooves thrust upon us as the wind howled outside.

This, their 14th night, the now virtually new band reminded us why the original concept became a cult, and commercial, success.

It has to be said that they didn't quite get the same reception of the originals at Carnegie, but a warm welcome ensued. We didn't quite know

what to expect, because there were 'faces' we instantly recognised, and now we're effectively dealing with a new band carrying the baton. Except for band leader Jesus Ramos band-leader and trombonist, singer Carlos Calunga, who were wearing white suits, the remaining members were soberly dressed. Obviously some of the new generation see things differently, but it didn't quite work because they looked more like cabaret performers.

Also, from a fan's perspective, there was a severe lack of content from the original album tracklisting – it took up to song seven, almost half way through the night - before they hit anything recognisable – the wonderful De Camino A La Vereda.

It was a slow build up until then, with occasional dancing from Ramos and Valdes, but all concerned proved they were worthy members especially pianist Ronaldo Luna (a rising star) who delivered some spellbinding moments. When Torres emerged centre stage for his solo on Bodas De Oro he was given a heroes welcome, and on El Carretero singer Idania Valdes showed a fine set of tubes though she lacked the sublime tones of Omara Portuondo, but she certainly brought the night alive.



One of the major highlights was a sort of call-and-response exhibition between on Sr. Trombon starring Ramos and Mirabal. After the scintillating display they gave each other an affectionate hug, followed by well deserved applause.



When they hit Chan Chan, the opener on the original album and the Carnegie gig, the atmosphere was raised again – it was probably the THE one we'd really waited for and it gave The Trumpet Of Cuba - Manuel Mirabal - a chance to give one of his best solo sequences of the night. Dropping-in 60s hit Quantalamera proved a masterstroke as it gave the crowd a chance to sing, and dance, closing the main set with a pulsating Tula a a standing ovation.

Back on stage after a short break, Carlos Calunga asked, "You want more?" in his Spanish accent .Yes they shrieked. "Only one?". "No" they yelled even louder. So we got two – Dos Gardenias and Candela from the original album, leaving us in doubt that the spirit of that idea over a decade ago, is well and truly alive.

The magic created way back then was definitely missing, but this is as close as you'll get.

The verdict – Long live Buena Vista Social Club.

Weblink: buenavistasocialclub.com

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