

Sunday Republican

Leisure Section

March 2003

Ry Cooder and Manuel Galbran, "Mambo Sihuendo" (None-such/Perro Verde) ★★★★★

Continuing his excursion into Cuban music that started with the widely-acclaimed "Buena Vista Social Club" in 1997, Ry Cooder's latest recording finds him teamed with veteran Cuban guitarist/keyboardist Manuel Galbran for a series of vintage-flavored instrumentals.

The 12-song set aims at recreating the sound of Cuban pop music from the 1950s, when it was crossing over into American jazz and pop styles. Galbran, longtime guitarist and arranger for Cuba's phenomenally popular doo-wop quartet Los Zafiros, proves to be the perfect partner for Cooder. Their electric collaborations on tracks like the seductive and softly percussive "Dru Me Negrita," the richly atmospheric, twang-textured "La Luna En Tu Mirada" or the playful, upbeat "Patricia," are consistently entrancing.

While it's a guitar lover's album, the pair occasionally let other instruments take over, most notably on the piano showcase "Bolero Sonambulo."

Recorded in Havana in 2001, the disc also spotlights longtime Cooder collaborator Jim Keltner on drums and bassist Orlando "Cachaito" Lopez.