



## GREG LANDAU

GREG LANDAU, co-founder of the recording label Round World Music and co-producer of the Grammy nominated series Ritmo y Candela, reflects on the musical experiences that have taken him from his native San Francisco to Cuba and Nicaragua. Read on...

D. Navas

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**1. You developed a passion for Cuban music at an early age, and you've been doing a great deal of work to project that music to the world. In light of the renewed interest for this cultural expression, how do you see the actual development of Cuban, and Cuban-oriented music in this new millenium?**

**GREG:** "I think that Cuba has been a cultural crossroads for centuries, bridging the many cultures that have come there. Cuban music has had a wide appeal because of the way that it is able to incorporate so many cultural elements in an appealing way, expressing the celebration of life, sensuality and the forces of nature that is the essence of music. Cuban music incorporates these elements from the African and European traditions in a unique synthesis that appeals to people across cultural lines. Since the 1960's young Cubans have been given the opportunity to study their own culture and folklore without many of the commercial influences and colonial attitudes that have distorted and denigrated many other Latin American countries unique cultural expressions. The new generation of musicians is schooled in European musical traditions and American jazz, as well as the Cuban traditional music forms, which has led to many very interesting fusions and new forms of expression. In many cases the most interesting works are never recorded or exported outside the island because of their complexity and lack of obvious commercial potential. It is interesting to compare the sheer energy and complex dialogues that you hear in live performances compared to the flatness in the recordings of Cuba's top bands. I see Cuban musicians as influencing and leading new musical movements for a long time."



**2. Round World Music started as a home-based project, and expanded to a well-known, specialized recording label. Can you comment in retrospective about your experience over these years, and tell us about your projections for the future?**

**GREG:** "Round World Music began as a project to record music that nobody else would record, the records that myself and Robert Leaver would like to listen to. My experience working and living in Nicaragua during the 1980's taught me that anything was possible if you were willing to make sacrifices and work hard. My work with Luis Enrique and Carlos Mejia Godoy showed me the possibilities of recording great music with limited resources. When I returned to the US in 1991 I began recording music on portable digital equipment that became available in the early 1990's. I recorded in my house, in other people's living rooms and eventually took my rig to Cuba where we recorded Los Terry and Pancho Quinto in a house in Havana. My work with Patato and Enrique Fernandez with Puerto Rican poet Piri Thomas showed me that improvisation in the studio could lead to interesting possibilities and I began making records based on basic tracks that came out of a descarga or jam session. I found that these moments of unguarded emotion produced the raw energy that I needed to create great songs. I later added things on top, vocals, horns etc. to create songs. I am now working with a group from East LA called Quetzal and working on another Patato record with Omar

Sosa as well as a funk record with Cuban singer Bobi Cespedes."

**3. Let's talk about Cuba Without Borders. The music contained in this compilation covers a rich mixture of traditional and modern approaches. What can you tell us about the experience of working with these wonderful musicians?**

**GREG:** "All of the musicians on this record are my friends and part of a musical family that has developed between the United States and Cuba. The common thread is that we all have deep respect for the traditions and roots of Cuban music and are using them to create new expressions that use these elements as tools to explore our own experiences and document this beautiful moment of crossover and cultural mixture. It is amazing to see rumba festivals in San Francisco and rap and heavy metal in Cuba, the borders are melting away and people grab the musical styles that can be used to convey their own feelings and outlook."

**4. "Latin jazz" is a generic term that covers several currents. Afro-Cuban music has been instrumental in the development of this genre. But now, Latin jazz expands its horizons, and we see more and more artists with different backgrounds integrating their own musical heritages in their compositions. Can you comment on this phenomenon?**

**GREG:** "I try to stay away from terms such as Latin jazz and I avoid the j-word as much as I can as these terms tend to build up more barriers and boundaries that musicians themselves try to break down. I think that what is happening is that the new avenues of distribution give the public access to music that they weren't able to hear before. Musicians have always been incorporating their heritage in the music but the public never was able to hear it. The airwaves and the recording industries always looked for the formulaic and "folkloric" music that fit their marketing plans and could reach the widest audience. The possibilities of new recording technologies and alternative distribution methods allows people to hear music from other cultures, and musicians themselves to market music that would never fit into the commercial formulas."

**5. Finally, I know you are involved in some other projects related to music and culture. Can you tell us about that?**

**GREG:** "I studied Cultural Anthropology and I have a PhD in Communications. I have long been interested in music as a form of communication and the ways that music expresses ideas in subjective and subtle ways. In Nicaragua it was amazing to see the way that music became the principal means of communication for the Sandinista movement trying to reach a mass of people unused to speeches, or written communication. The poetry and music and other oral traditions became the main form of political communication as the Sandinistas tried to forge a new society. I continue this work on my own making ethnographic videos and trying to create music that breaks the molds and formulas of pop music. I still maintain my ideals and beliefs that it is possible to change the world and to create a society based on equality and social justice. I think that music will always be a voice that can break down walls and topple dictatorships."

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