



OCHO DE BASTOS

# Fusion

THE MANY FLAVORS OF LATIN MUSIC | BY DONNA CEDAR-SOUTHWORTH



Five musical artists—three from Puerto Rico, one from Venezuela and one from the Dominican Republic—found each other here in the United States, combined their musical instincts, tastes and talents, evolving into a national and international music phenomenon that has exceeded even their own wildest expectations.

The sound of Ocho de Bastos echoes the brilliance of Carlos Santana. Their newly released CD of originals is a delightful, seductive fusion of tropical rhythms such as merengue, salsa, reggae and reggaeton, with each song bringing its own sound and flavor and leaving listeners satisfied, yet eager for an encore. The five musicians bring more than just talent to their performances—they bring passion and heart.

“It is a very well-synced show that’s enjoyable not only for the listening part but also for the performance—for the show,” says lead vocalist and former professional salsa dancer Milton Rocco, who hails from Puerto Rico.

“It’s like a good wine tasting—we’re taking you on a trip of various styles of Latin music with our music,” adds keyboardist Daniel Santos (also from Puerto Rico). “A lot of people [equate] Latin with salsa,” says drummer Raúl Quiroz, a native of Venezuela. “But [our music is] also highlighting that when you go to our countries, it’s not all about salsa. A lot of people listen to pop rock—it’s not all just dancing salsa and merengue—there are many other flavors to this trip, this journey; we try to take the audience [to places] we might go in our countries, and it kind of breaks that boundary of just dance music. It brings us into a lot of other things, and that’s where we take everyone—it’s an entire party with...many rhythms...a lot of flavors.”

The group is not attempting to define a specific style, says Raúl: “We like to expose the variety of Latin music through our fusion.... We want it to grow more like a concept of a performance—that’s very versatile—even [in terms of] the venue and audience that will be enjoying our show. In doing that, we have built a unique sound



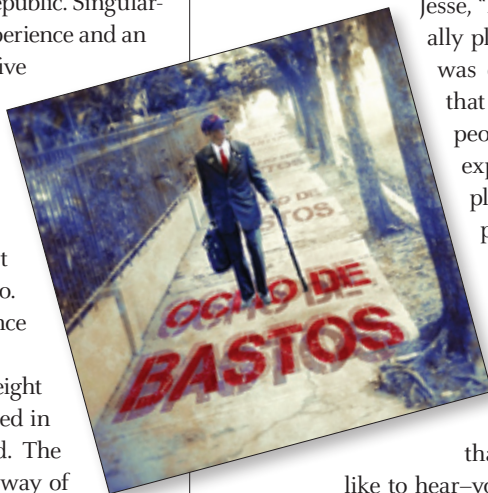
that no one has been able to compare us to. It's quite unique. [People tell us], 'We cannot put a tag on you.' It's versatile and everyone gets it from a different place, but in the end, it's building those different rhythms, building those different songs—it has built indirectly a very unique sound."

Rounding out the ensemble are lead guitarist Jesse Robles from Puerto Rico and bass guitarist Hipólito "Hipo" González from the Dominican Republic. Singularly, each musician brings a lifetime of experience and an affinity for his culture; combined, the five deliver unforgettable performances—from small gigs such as corporate events and weddings to venues such as the State Theater and the 9:30 Club, as well as outdoor events before thousands in front of the U.S. Capitol. "We're not just musicians just playing music," says Rocco. "We really want to provide that experience of the live performance."

Ocho de Bastos, named after the eight of clubs in Spanish playing cards, formed in 2009 and evolved, grew and solidified. The musicians saw their collaboration as a way of unifying the different Hispanic cultures in the Washington, D.C., area and "working as an interface for the non-Hispanic people," says Daniel. The group proved a sensation and its popularity soared. Soon Ocho de Bastos was opening for some of the greats: Jarabe de Palo, a major rock band from Spain; Los Enanitos Verdes from Argentina; and Caramelos de Cianuro, a Venezuelan rock band. The group was especially thrilled to

play alongside Argentinean musician Nito Mestre, described by Daniel as "one of the founding fathers of the Latin rock movement."

Hipo, who played guitar in rock bands throughout high school and college, brings an unforgettable fire to his bass guitar performance. Jesse has been playing guitar since he was nine, performing in bands and jamming. "When Dan summoned us," says Jesse, "I didn't even care if we actually played in front of anybody—it was cool just playing the songs that we all like to play and that people like to hear.... I didn't expect to be recording a CD or playing everywhere that we've played or traveling to other states and countries."



And there have been opportunities for creative growth, notes Jesse: "While we started as a tour band—playing music that we like to hear and people like to hear—you always have the itch as a musician to do your own thing. We all contribute to the songwriting."

Five musicians from different parts of the world—found each other here in the United States—and people keep coming back for more. See Ocho de Bastos live at Viva! Vienna! on May 25 (see Calendar).

Ocho de Bastos | [www.ochodebastos.com](http://www.ochodebastos.com)

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*Above, top: From left, Daniel Santos, Jesse Robles, Hipo González, Milton Rocco and Raúl Quiroz; and Ocho de Bastos recently released an album of original works.*

*Opposite page, top: Ocho de Bastos features, from left, Daniel Santos, Raúl Quiroz, Milton Rocco, Jess Robles and Hipo González; bottom: Bass Guitarist Hipo González performs at a Cinco de Mayo event in 2012.*

*Photographs by Katherine Sepúlveda*