



past
present
future
of salsa
in the
bay area

THE LAST MAMBO

a documentary by Rita Hargrave

PRESS KIT

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Running time: 55:10 minutes,
in English

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CO-DIRECTOR/ CO-PRODUCER
Reginald D. Brown

ASSOCIATE PRODUCER
Wayne Wallace

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LOGLINE

San Francisco Bay Area salsa and Latin jazz performers and audiences struggle to maintain culture, creativity and community in the face of powerful socioeconomic and demographic changes. This fascinating history of the Bay Area Latin music scene explores the post WWII growth of California's multi-ethnic music community, the 1950's Mambo craze, the 70's heyday of Salsa and subsequent expansions of the art form. In today's fast-changing environment, despite decreasing audiences and venues, Bay Area performers are transforming the future of the Afro-Latin music and dance through education and outreach.



SYNOPSIS

The Last Mambo explores the past, present and future of the San Francisco Bay Area's Salsa and Latin jazz community. The film reveals how for decades socio-economic and political marginalization have threatened the growth and survival of the Latin music and dance community. Since the 1930's African American and Latino musicians have struggled under the weight of segregation to reach out to multi-ethnic audiences. In the 1940's local bands and visiting headliners like Tito Puente courted largely minority audiences at venues like Sweet's Ballroom in Oakland and Jimbo's Bop City, a fixture in the largely African American Fillmore district of San Francisco. When Mambo swept the nation in the 1950's the music expanded to more high profile venues and reached more ethnically diverse audiences through the pioneering artistry of Cal Tjader and newly arrived Afro-Cuban percussionists Mongo Santamaria, Armando Perazzo and Francisco Aguabella.

These musicians launched a tradition of cultural cross-pollination and social engagement among Latino and Non-Latino musicians. For the next 50 years, scores of dedicated Bay Area musicians and dancers have produced electrifying live performances and Grammy-winning recordings. They have also nurtured generations of Afro-Cuban music lovers of every age and ethnicity. The art form continues to inspire education, cultural preservation and community building. Since 2000, however, the Bay Area Latin music community has been battling new forms of adversity. The region's booming tech sector, sky-rocketing real estate prices and shrinking audiences have forced scores of Latin music venues to shut their doors. Yet undaunted, the energetic musicians, dancers and radio hosts of today strive to meet the challenge by transforming the future of Salsa and Latin Jazz through education and outreach at music schools, community centers and radio stations. *The Last Mambo* celebrates their passion and dedication to perform, educate and inspire the next generation of musicians, dancers and participants.



CHAPTER I — OUR ROOTS

Though rooted in Afro-Latin music and social traditions, the San Francisco Bay Area salsa and Latin jazz community has been forged by performers and participants from diverse cultural and artistic backgrounds. Since the Bay Area has not had large Cuban or Puerto community, the music took a different path than it did in New York. As Wayne Wallace, trombonist, teacher and band leader notes,

"I think of everything we do here as being so hybrid. We don't have on set Puerto Rican community, one Dominican community, one Cuban community... That's why...the possibility of doing so many different things and styles happen coming out of this area. Because no one has to stay in one camp."

From Cal Tjader's Modern Mambo Quintet in the 1950's to today's bands Louie Romero's Mazacote or John Santo's Machete Ensemble excel at their innovative use of traditional forms and instruments. The Bay Area's culturally inclusive sensibility has provided fertile environment for AfroLatin folkloric styles and less well known Cuban musical ensembles like charangas to flourish. Few communities in the country can boast such long legacy of supporting Charanga bands like Orquesta la Moderna Tradicion, which is dedicated to the 19th century Cuban-style danzón, an elegant but less well known sound featuring flutes and violins interweaving with the traditional the brass and percussion and rhythm sections.

San Francisco Bay Area salsa dancers also draw inspiration from other movement styles into salsa including hustle, Lindy Hop, tango, Hip Hop and Afro-Cuban folkloric dances.



CHAPTER II — HOMEFRONT

This segment explores the role of pivotal people and dance spaces that shaped the evolution of the San Francisco Bay Area salsa community. From Cal Tjader's mambo's at the Macumba club in the 1950s to today's Salsa block parties, the San Francisco Bay Area has fostered social integration and community building, attracting people of all ages and ethnicities. Non-profit community-based organizations like La Pena, Mission Cultural Center support this social consciousness and commitment to community engagement through their music dance education programs. But in recent years the economic and social changes in San Francisco have resulted in the closing of numerous dance spaces such as Jelly's which has heralded changes in the cohesiveness of the social fabric of the San Francisco Bay Area salsa and Latin jazz community.



CHAPTER III — MAMBO SESSIONS

This final segment highlights how today's music education programs continue the Bay Area tradition of training the next generation performers and participants, promoting community spirit and increase public awareness of the origins and social relevance of salsa and other Afro-Latin music forms. Since the 1980's education opportunities ranging from formal lectures and workshops to informal drum circles in the parks and community based arts organizations like Mission Cultural Center and La Pena have been gathering places for performers and participants.



CHAPTER IV — CESAR RULES

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CHAPTER VI — MILLENNIUM SALSA

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DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Latin music and dance ignited my life in 1995 and since then I have spent thousands of rapturous hours dancing, teaching and writing about salsa and absorbing Latin jazz. “The Last Mambo” was inspired by my first trip to Havana, a city overflowing with conservatories, theaters and museums devoted to the rich music and dance heritage of the Cuban people. My conversation with Olav Alen Rodriguez, a renowned Cuban ethnomusicologist, convinced me that the Bay Area Latin music community had its own diverse, ever evolving story that needed to be told.

What is unique about our story? Wayne Wallace, composer, trombonist and musical director of “The Last Mambo said it best: “Everything we do here artistically is a hybrid. There is no one Cuban community, Dominican community or Puerto Rican community. We have the possibility for creating fresh new music here because nobody has to stay in any one camp.”

While making this film, I discovered that for over 60 years Bay artists who hail from across the country and all over the world have freely cross-pollinated, collaborated and created our unique brand Afro-Latino music. I was blown away by the interviews and published material for the film that showed how the Latin music scene was also a magnet for racial integration and social empowerments.

But the closure of Jelly’s, one of my favorite salsa hangouts, in 2005, drove home the fragile and transient nature this art form. The demise of Jelly’s was a harbinger of the dismantlement of an artistic community, bulldozed by soaring real estate prices, sprawling gentrification and the changing social demographics of the current tech boom. “The Last Mambo” celebrates the community’s struggle to survive by promoting education and outreach to music and dance lovers of all ages, social classes and ethnicities.

“The Last Mambo” is about hope, solidarity and resilience in the face of inescapable social change. I want more people to appreciate and applaud the talent we have here, find out more about the pillars of the Latin music and dance community, and support live music. I would love for people in other cities (e.g. Seattle, Portland, Chicago, D.C) to explore and document their own salsa and Latin jazz communities’ past, present and future. All along this film making journey I have been thrilled by the encouragement and support from friends and family for this project.

“The Last Mambo” is a hopeful documentary that showcases Salsa and Latin Jazz in the Bay Area as a potent social force that brings together our diverse community of performers and participants, embodies cultural preservation and promotes artistic expression and education.

Love the dance, live the music.

Rita Hargrave

THE MUSIC

Due out in 2015, the documentary traverses the resident salsa world from its roots to its current state. A passionate cast made up of musicians, entrepreneurs, DJs and dancers, tell the story of how Afro-Latin based music made its way to the SF Bay. The Last Mambo explores the diverse cultural landscape, social history and future of the San Francisco Bay Area salsa music and dance community,” adds Hargrave. This collection, Salsa De La Bahia, is the musical companion to The Last Mambo and showcases some great unsung hits heard only on local radio and in nightclubs. These pieces are sterling reflections of the state-of-the-art salsa music that artists in the Bay Area have culled. “Rita and I chose the songs with the idea of this CD being a dance record that showed the musical diversity of what the Bay Area scene has to offer,” comments Wayne.

There is no better person for the task of producing the soundtrack for The Last Mambo than Wayne Wallace. From playing to the pen, Dr. Wayne, a title bequeathed to him by the great Pete Escovedo, is a student of Cuban music with impressive salsa and Latin jazz credentials. They include being musical director of the Pete Escovedo Orchestra, John Santos & The Machete Ensemble, and Conjunto Cespedes as well as sideman gigs with luminaries like Tito Puente and Manny Oquendo & Libre. The musical spectrum of Salsa De La Bahia shows the kaleidoscope of Afro-Latin musical colors seen and heard around the Bay Area. Complimenting this rich collection are three original pieces recorded at an all-star session in 2012. “Everyone understood that this was an opportunity to make a collective musical and artistic statement about the music we have played for years,” explains Wayne. “We spoke of the lineage of Cal Tjader, Carlos Federico and the many musicians who helped create this music.” Salsa De La Bahia truly honors those who have dedicated their careers to playing and advancing salsa and its Afro-Caribbean roots as well as the people that surround the scene to dance, listen and cheer their hometown heroes. It pays due to a scene now recognized internationally for the caliber of its musicians and dancers but that is still largely ignored for its artistic merit by the mainstream media.





PLAYERS

MUSICIANS

Cesar Ascarrunz
David Belove
Anthony Blea
John Calloway
Edgardo Cambon
Bobi Cespedes
Jesus Diaz
Pete Escovedo
Roger Glenn
Rebeca Mauleon
Kat Parra
Louie Romero
John Santos
Benny Velarde
Orestes Vilató
Wayne Wallace

DANCERS

Selma Abinader
Jose Barroso
Lester Washington
Herman Bossett
Ceci Chevere

RADIO HOSTS

Chuy Varela
Chata Gutierrez
Jose Ruiz
Luis Medina
Emiliano Ecchevaria

EDUCATORS

John Calloway Ph.D.
Francesca Rivera Ph.D.
Sylvia Ramirez

FEATURED BANDS

Anthony Blea Y Su Charanga
Avance
Bay Area Timba All-Stars
Edgardo Cambon and Candela
John Santos Latin Jazz Quintet
John Santos & The Machete Ensemble
La Orquesta Moderna Tradicion
Latin Jazz Youth Ensemble
Machito and his Afro Cubans
Pacific Mambo Orchestra
Pete Escovedo Latin Jazz Orchestra
Rebeca Mauleon and AfroKuban
Ruben Hurtado Ensemble
Wayne Wallace Latin Jazz Quintet

THE MAKERS



RITA HARGRAVE – DIRECTOR/PRODUCER/WRITER/VIDEOGRAPHER

Rita is a dancer, dance teacher, dance historian and geriatric psychiatrist. She is the founder of www.salsaroots.com, a San Francisco Bay Area based website devoted to the Afro-Cuban, Afro-Puerto Rican and African American roots of salsa dancing. Rita co-produced with Wayne Wallace, founder of Patois Records, of the CD sets Salsa De La Bahia Volume I and Volume II. This is her first feature film.



REGINALD D. BROWN – CO-DIRECTOR/PRODUCER/WRITER/ VIDEOGRAPHER

Reginald D. Brown is a freelance writer/producer/director and a member of the Directors Guild of America, Inc and Writers Guild of America, west. His extensive career in film and television production includes documentaries such as Witness to a Dream and Profile in Courage, Linda L. Smith, both of which chronicle the rise of two African American educators and their academic learning centers for underserved minorities. His PBS documentary I Remember Beale Street explored the downward spiral of what had once been a historic Memphis neighborhood and legendary birthplace of the “Blues.” He is an instructor in television, video and digital media at University of California, Los Angeles.



PAUL KEALOHA BLAKE – VIDEOGRAPHER/EDITOR

Paul is a Hawaiian storyteller, independent producer and co-founder of East Bay Media Center, a 501(c)3 Non-profit Corporation established in Berkeley, California in 1980. Under Paul’s direction East Bay Media Center provides technical and educational media resources to East Bay communities. In 1991, Paul with co-founder Mel Valpour launched the Berkeley Video and Film Festival. Paul is a tireless educator and media advocate for community involvement, especially for marginalized youth and minorities. He has an extensive history in the production and promotion of documentary films.



CARL PFIRMAN – EDITOR

Carl is celebrated editor and writer who won the prestigious Huminatas Award from the International Documentary Association in December, 2014 for his documentary Limited Partnership. His work has been recognized at many prestigious film festivals including the Toronto Film Festival for Janeane from Des Moines and Telluride and Cannes Pavillion for Six Little War. His HBO feature documentary film A Small Act premiered at the 2010 Sundance Film Festival. It has been nominated for a 2011 EMMY AWARD and was selected as one of the best documentaries of 2010 by critic Roger Ebert.

THE MAKERS



WAYNE WALLACE – MUSICAL DIRECTOR/TROMBONIST/COMPOSER/ARRANGER/EDUCATOR

Six-time Grammy nominee Wayne Wallace is one of the most respected exponents of African American-Latin music in the world today. He is known for the use of traditional forms and styles in combination with contemporary music, and has earned recognition with his recent placement in the Downbeat Critics Polls under the trombone and producer categories. Mr. Wallace is an accomplished arranger, educator, and composer of music for film and television. He has also received grants from the Creative Work Fund, the National Endowments for the Arts the Lila Wallace Foundation and the San Francisco Arts Commission. Mr. Wallace has performed, recorded and studied with acknowledged masters of the Afro-Latin and jazz idioms such as Aretha Franklin, Bobby Hutcherson, Earth Wind and Fire,

Pete Escovedo, Santana, Julian Priester, Conjunto Libre, Whitney Houston, Tito Puente, Steve Turre, John Lee Hooker, Con-funk-shun, Francisco Aguabella, Manny Oquendo and Libre, Max Roach, the Count Basie Orchestra and Orestes Vilató. He is a professor of practice in jazz at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music.



JESSE “CHUY” VARELA – SPECIAL CONSULTANT

Chuy is the music director at KCSM FM 91, the Bay Area’s jazz station, and has written for the SF Chronicle, Latin Beat, Jazz Times and numerous other publications. His 30+ year career in radio includes broadcast and administrative assignments at KPFA 94.1 FM in Berkeley, KJAZ Radio in Alameda, Pacifica Radio and National Public Radio. He has served as a consultant for the Smithsonian Institution, the Oakland Museum and the SF Mexican Museum. In 2006, Varela was awarded a Bob Geddins Lifetime Achievement Award by the West Coast Blues Hall of Fame in Oakland, and a Salsa Ambassador Award from the West Coast Salsa Congress in Los Angeles.

Chuy has produced several CDs including “To A Mambo King - The Carlos Federico Memorial Album (JCV), “Pachuco Boogie” (Arhoolie) and “Ay Califas! Raza rocks the 70s & 80s” (Rhino). He has written numerous liner notes and translations for record companies like Verve, Concord, Nonesuch and Six Degrees. He has lectured on Latin Jazz at Stanford University, UC Berkeley, UC Riverside, UC Santa Cruz, San Jose State and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. Chuy has been hosted “Latin Jazz” a 4 hour Sunday afternoon radio program on KCSM since the mid-1980’s.

ADDITIONAL CREDITS

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Ceci Chevere
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Photofest
Pond 5
Pinderhughes Family
Elizabeth Pepin Silva
Walter Wagner
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Orestes Vilato

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Purple Lynx

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ScanArt

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SOUND DESIGN

Gary Mankin