



DOSSIER DE PRESSE

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By Ernesto Lechner

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The song begins like any traditional tango would: a pulsating bass line is joined by velvety piano and the impossibly nostalgic riffs of the bandoneon -- the accordion-like instrument that defines the quintessentially Argentine dance genre. A soulful female vocalist sings melancholy lyrics of love and hope. But then, unexpectedly, a thumping drum machine pushes the song firmly into the new millennium. The smoky bandoneon licks collide with the artificial beat, creating a dreamy fusion of old and new, retro glamor and futuristic cool.

It's the sound of Gotan Project, a Paris-based trio that has gained worldwide acclaim by fusing electronica with tango.

Titled "Lunatico," the collective's recently released second album provides an eloquent picture of the changes that Latin music has undergone in the last few years. From Argentina and Colombia to Spain, Mexico and the United States, the musical creations of contemporary Latino artists are integrating elements of hip-hop, rock and electronica into an irresistible pan-cultural stew.

"The success that we're enjoying right now may seem somewhat obvious," says Gotan founding member Philippe Cohen Solal. "Back in 1999, however, it was just impossible for me to imagine that not only the deejays and clubgoers would love our own version of tango but that hard-core tango dancers would embrace our brand of electronica. Luckily, I was wrong."

Gotan is certainly not alone in its musical crusade to update Latin music. Consider:

- In Mexico, outfits such as **Nortec Collective**, **Plastilina Mosh** and record label executive Camilo Lara's **Mexican Institute of Sound** create vibrant electronica collages by sampling regional styles norteno, banda sinaloense and Mexican cumbia.

- A new generation of Brazilian performers, including Bebel Gilberto, Bossacucanova, Cibelle and Celso Fonseca, have revived the smooth style of bossa nova by mixing it with ambient atmospherics and chill-out beats.

- From Puerto Rico's Tego Calderon and Spain's La Mala Rodriguez to Cuban collective Orishas, Latin rap has blossomed by tailoring the expressiveness of Spanish poetry to thought-provoking rhymes.

- The most adventuresome Latin genre of the last 15 years, rock en espanol continues to generate exciting new acts, from Argentina glam-rockers Babasonicos to Colombia's tropically flavored **Aterciopelados** and Mexico's psychedelic trio Liquits.

- Hailing from Barcelona, **the Pinker Tones** add vague echoes of samba and Latin lounge to pop miniatures populated by vintage keyboards and absurdist lyrics.

At the epicenter of these new sounds is Nacional Records, a label launched last year out of Los Angeles by Tomas Cookman.

A veteran Latin music entrepreneur, Cookman had long dreamed of founding his own boutique label.



When he found out that Nortec Collective and Aterciopelados -- both relatively established acts in the Latin alternative field -- were looking for a label contract, he felt the time was ripe for Nacional to become a reality.

The company's first two releases were the solo debut by Andrea Echeverri, Aterciopelados' lead singer, and the much anticipated sequel to Nortec's trendsetting 2001 debut "The Tijuana Sessions Vol. 1." Both discs have enjoyed respectable record sales and critical acclaim.

"I felt that launching the label with two such different and unique records was a noble beginning," says Cookman from the headquarters of Nacional in North Hollywood. "As a record collector, I grew up following labels like Motown, Def Jam, Sub Pop, Stiff and Sire -- the kind of brand that suggests a specific sound the moment you hear the name. I especially admired Sire, because it had the guts to sign Talking Heads and The Ramones, but also Madonna. That's the kind of philosophy that I'd like to espouse with Nacional."

Cookman began his career on a high note, shepherding rock en español outfit Fabulosos Cadillacs from obscurity in their Buenos Aires hometown to their transformation into the first Latin alternative supergroup in the early '90s.

The executive's ear for innovative sounds becomes apparent when you take a look at Nacional's roster, which also includes The Pinker Tones, Mexican Institute of Sound and Chile's offbeat electronic quartet Bitman & Roban.

Mirroring the strongest trend in Latin music, most of the label's acts anchor their sound in electronica, combining their digital soundscapes with a strong influence from so-called "lounge music" -- the easy-listening records of bossa, mambo and cha cha cha that were particularly popular during the '50s and '60s.

Acts such as The Pinker Tones and Gotan Project mirror a global trend that is not limited to the Latin music world.

"The idea is to use modern technology to record music that's contemporary but also strongly inspired by tradition," adds Gotan's Solal. "During the '90s, [Gotan co-founder] Christoph Muller and I produced club tracks with Brazilian musicians based in Paris. Gotan Project allowed us to bring tango back to the dance floors of the 21st Century."

Critical reception has been extremely warm for the exhilarating sounds of cutting-edge Latin -- but the albums themselves are not selling millions of copies. At least, according to Cookman, not yet.

Nacional could have capitalized on the popularity of reggaeton -- the infectious combination of Latin hip-hop and Panamanian reggae that has been sweeping the Latin charts for the last year. But Cookman says he prefers to stick to acts that speak to his heart, maintaining a specific label identity with a roster of artists that are somewhat related to one another.

"I'm not interested in a crash-and-burn situation," he says. "We're in it for the long run. Nacional is here to stay."



October 28, 2006

Alternative Acts Stir Latin Scene

By JOHN JURGENSEN
October 28, 2006; Page P10

When Latin-music artists, producers and label executives pack the Latin Grammy Awards in New York next week, they'll be celebrating a record year for the genre.

More people downloaded Colombian pop singer Shakira's latest hit this year than the Red Hot Chili Peppers'. Sales of Latin music are up 5.8% this year compared with this time last year, according to Nielsen SoundScan, putting the genre on track to meet or surpass last year's 36 million albums, its highest sales level ever. The subgenre known as reggaetón, led by stars like Daddy Yankee, who raps in Spanish over reggae-inflected hip-hop music, has gained a mainstream foothold.

While Latin pop and reggaetón have dominated headlines this year, another genre, known as Latin alternative, is quietly achieving success. The category, something of a catchall for nontraditional Latin groups that can't be classified as pop, embraces wide-ranging influences, from rock to electronic music to hip-hop.

The genre has been championed for years by indie-rock critics and college radio stations, but it's beginning to cross over into the mainstream. Cookman International, a management company closely identified with Latin alternative music, says songs by two of its artists will be featured in next week's season premiere of the music-heavy Fox series "The O.C."

Jose Tillán, senior vice president of music programming for MTV Tr3s, a bilingual channel that launched last month, credits the Internet for broadening the genre's reach, through Web radio and sites like MySpace.

On the road, Latin music has gained ground, as cities such as Atlanta and Portland, Ore., develop larger Hispanic populations and become tour stops for more Latin acts.

The Latin alternative genre is gaining in popularity. Four songs to sample:

Nortec Collective, "Tengo La Voz" (Nacional Records)

Pastora, "Desolado"



Aterciopelados, "Complemento" (Nacional Records)

Julieta Venegas, "Limon y Sal"

Below, a look at the Latin Grammy nominees for best alternative album.

Babasónicos, "Anoche"



One of Argentina's most popular acts, this group has an eclectic sound that veers from punchy rock to twangy Western guitars mixed with synthesizers.

Café Tacuba, "Un Viaje"



The band's deft mix of styles, from punk to ballads, has made the group a fixture on influential radio stations such as KCRW in Santa Monica, Calif.

Nortec Collective, "Tijuana Sessions Vol. 3" (NACIONAL RECORDS)



Blending traditional norteño music into electronic compositions, this Tijuana, Mexico, group performs live with laptop computers.

Rolling Stone

★★★ 1/2

Nortec Collective **Tijuana Sessions Vol. 3** Nacional Records/ADA

Many acts combine indigenous ethnic music with international electronic beats, but few do it with as much *cojones* as Nortec Collective of Tijuana, Mexico. The group samples and loops snippets of mostly local musicians playing trumpet, tuba, clarinet, accordion, guitar and various Latin percussion instruments, then digitally stirs the spicy results. Like Paris' twenty-first-century-tango Gotan Project, Nortec create updated lounge sounds for both dancing and chilling. On the sequel to their 2001 debut, *Tijuana Sessions Vol. 1*, Nortec lean heavily on organic, acoustic sounds: The frolicsome vocal cut "Tijuana Makes Me Happy" is as much indie pop as Beck, a kindred fusionist whom the Nortec folks have previously remixed. The mostly instrumental tracks throughout have less hipster cool than before but more summery, south-of-the-border appeal, and you don't need a passport or even your name on the guest list.

BARRY WALTERS
(Posted Aug 25, 2005)

Le plus exotique

Nortec Collective
« Tijuana sessions Vol. 3 »

(BECAUSE)

Le nord du Mexique est devenu la plaque tournante d'un trip hop régénéré, croisement entre la dureté du son new-yorkais et une douceur de vivre sud-américaine.

Biba
Février 07

