

## The Irish Times

### Performance Review by SIOBHÁN LONG

**Elio Villafranca Jazz Quartet Music Network**

**The Coach House, Dublin Castle**

That point of intersection, where American and Cuban music collides is a moving target. Cuban pianist, Roberto Fonseca who visited Dublin late last year, revelled in the interleaving of Latin rhythms and Manhattanite candour and control. Elio Villafranca mines an altogether more dispassionate and propulsive seam, where his Cuban roots ground his sizzling quartet. Relish their release into the more turbulent waters of American jazz as soon as the lights go down.

Villafranca's control is palpable from the get go. *Negríta Prende La Vela* (from his first recording, *Incantations/Encantaciones* ) soars on the back of his languid piano and saxophonist, Jane Bunnett's breathtaking explorations of both rhythm and melody, the pair fencing with one another in Olympian feats of concentration. Bassist, Yunior Terry paces like a panther through the undergrowth and drummer, Ludwig Afonso brings an unfettered, often dissonant voice to the mix.

Elio Villafranca's style is immersed in that quintessential Cuban pianist tradition, characterised by an indelible spirit of adventure, where players marry languid pacing with a profound desire for improvisation. He glories in an almost classical approach to composition on *Three Plus One* but then departs from any question of predictability with his driving, insistent route to infinity, egged on by Jane Bunnett who hurtled into overdrive, propelled by Villafranca's almost startling momentum.

Villafranca spoke with evident affection of his Cuban influences, from the often undervalued Cuban country music, Tonada to his original composition, *Oddua Suite*, which takes as its reference point the agricultural economy of his home place of Western Cuba's Pinar Del Rio. The fusion of folklore and jazz on the latter song was somewhat forced, a dissonant jigsaw puzzle that forced two traditions to share the limelight, rather than seeking to meld them in any way. Jane Bunnett introduced her flute for the second half of this breathtaking performance, although she struggled at times with a less than optimal microphone.

Her playing was the scaffold that united these three highly individual musicians, and echoed Villafranca's tone, which was meditative and utterly driven in equal parts. A magical and often challenging repertoire from start to finish.

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