

Mp3 Firme - Rock: Ska



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Ska and Punk met Salsa and they partied til dawn. 12 MP3 Songs ROCK: Ska, LATIN: Latin Pop Details: Firme comes from the East San Jose neighborhood of sal si puedes, which is Spanish for "get out if you can." It's a historical area; you can still shop at the supermarket where Cesar Chavez led some of his first demonstrations for la Causa, tweaking the despairing phrase sal si puedes into a mantra of hope: si se puede - yes you can. Firme - (pronounced fear-may) the name is Spanish for "strength" - has proven the point that yes, you can. After several cross country tours, a 1999 California Music Award for Outstanding Rock En Espanol and a three month stay on the Spanish Rock top ten with their eponymous debut CD, it's perhaps necessary for the band members to remind themselves that it wasn't so long ago that they were like so many of the kids you see in sal si puedes: young Latinos dressed in rock t-shirts, coming home from school with guitars slung Woody Guthrie-style over their shoulders. Christian Vela, Firme's guitarist, views these kids with a combination of delight and fervent optimism: "Man, there's kids out there right now - junior high, elementary - that are gonna knock us on our ass!" That will be difficult. Ever since founding members, Vela, bassist Danny Maldonado, and drummer Erik Loera began Firme in an eastside garage, the band has ridden a crescendo of energy and musical growth that has yet to reach its climax. Together with vocalist Bobby Jimenez, keyboardist Tom McClure, conga player Frank Graciano and the horn section of Jafid Moran (tenor sax), and Sergio Bernal (trumpet and timbales), Firme draws freely and happily from the myriad musical influences of its members. So free and unaffected is this blending of styles that the most difficult question the band members face these days is the seemingly innocuous "What kind of music do you play?" "When people ask that," Vela laughs, "It's like, do you have five or ten minutes you could sit down and I could tell you?" It is far better to let the music reveal itself. Ever the bastard offspring of "legitimate" musical forms, rock has always thrived best in the hands of young

musicians who break the rules due to the simple reason that they don't know the rules in the first place. No one ever told the members of Firme that the Cumbia and Afro-Cuban "doesn't go" with Vela's passions of Rocksteady Reggae and Ska, so they went ahead and put them together. And it doesn't stop there. Firme rewards the careful listener with touches of everything: bassist Maldonado's love of the Ramones and the Clash is evident, and there is more than a little Dizzy G - that horn section didn't spend years in public school jazz bands for nothing. To watch the reciprocal energy between Firme and their audience (Vela still has difficulty calling them "fans," preferring the word "friends" instead) is to glimpse this spontaneous combustion of joy in it's most natural form. On the stage and on disc, Firme has it dialed. "What do you call this?" asked an audience member in Greensboro, North Carolina. "Latin-oh? This is great!" In conversation, trying with words to convey what Firme is all about, Vela can only echo the sentiments of such fans - yes, fans - when he says, "This music feels so good!" After listening to this music, it will be hard to disagree. Si se puede; there is great reason for optimism.

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