

Mp3 Don Baaska Plays Rafael Hernandez - Latin: Bolero



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Music from the Heart of Puerto Rico by pianist Don Baaska and his trio. 12 MP3 Songs LATIN: Bolero, LATIN: Latin Jazz Details: It was the spring of 1954. I was playing with the quintet at the Club Caribe. We played American show tunes that the American tourists danced to and cha chas, merengues and mambos for the locals. Nobody called it salsa yet. It was 9 till 1 on weekdays and 10 to 4 on Saturdays. We were very chic in our white shawl collar dinner jackets. It was really an easy gig as we alternated with the 13 piece show band led by Cesar Concepcion. Now I never claimed to be a real "Lady of Spain" type accordion player, but most piano players in those days doubled as occasionally we would get on the job only to find the house piano totally unplayable. There was no such problem at the Caribe Hilton with the Steinway baby grand. My accordion was padded and had a mellow tone that blended well with a clarinet lead and after 3 Cuba Libres sounded like the Glen Miller sax section---well almost. One night I noticed a slim black gentleman seated at a table close to the bandstand and listening intently whenever I picked up the accordion. He invited me to his table for a drink and told me that he was recording an LP and wanted to feature that accordion clarinet sound. Well a lot of smoke gets blown in bars so I asked the bass player who he was. In a voice filled with reverence he replied "Man, that's Rafael Hernandez". A week later we recorded at Ochoa studios in San Juan. The piano player was Lusito Benjamin and the clarinet player was Luisito Pena. Don Rafael wrote the charts and produced 12 of his songs as instrumentals. Later I learned enough Spanish to understand the words to these songs and realized what a great song writer he was. BMI lists 999 of his songs but his total works number more than 3,000. He is well known and loved in Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Cuba and all over South America. Like his contemporaries, Cole Porter and Irving Berlin he wrote both the music and lyrics. Lamento Boricano was written in 1929 when he was living in Spanish Harlem. Preciosa was recently recorded by Mark Anthony

and is like a second Puerto Rican National Anthem. Rafael is best known for his songs about the beauty of the Puerto Rican countryside and the lives and struggles of the Jibaros who lived there. It was truly music from the heart of Puerto Rico. On this CD I tried to recreate the way we used to play these songs in the 50's and 60's Don Baaska

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