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Lend your ears to Miami's eclectic mix

By Neece Regis
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

MIAMI — “What’s up, Transit Lounge?!”

Shouted from the stage, it is like a call to action in this smoky, laid-back bar tucked in the shadow of the Metrorail. A wall of sound jolts the crowd into a full-speed adrenaline rush, as if we’ve all had high-test café Cubano shot straight into our veins.

Minutes before, I was on a couch watching a couple of guys

lackadaisically shooting pool while other patrons chatted at the square bar that fills the center of the barn-like room. Now the table and bar have been abandoned as bodies — dancing, twisting, shouting — press toward the 10-piece band and a barrage of music that’s simultaneously Afro-Cuban, hip-hop, R&B, Latin, funk, and unmistakably Miami.

The band, Suénalo Sound System (often simply Suénalo) has been playing together since August 2002.

“We’ve been pigeonholed as a Latin rock band, but we’re not that at all,” said Marcel Lecours, the band’s manager. “There’s something in it for everyone: funk, rap, rock, Spanish, English. I’d call it an ‘urban Latin-funk jam.’ The Latin-funk genre is very new.”

Suénalo grew out of a bohemian enclave of artists and musicians in Little Havana where, at any given time, 20 to 30 people

lived and played music in a large house they called Monkey Village.

The band’s current lineup hails from all over the globe — Cuba, Caracas, San Juan, Paris, Miami, New York, Chicago — and each member brings his own culture to the mix to create a sound that’s a fusion of South American, Caribbean, and urban American. Their fans, presumably from as many far-flung places, can’t get enough. They clap and shout for more as each song ends.

You can find more musicians who were part of the now-defunct Monkey Village at Jazid, a small but vibrant club with live music seven nights a week on Washington Street, the last bastion of urban, pre-chic South Beach.

Just before 1 a.m., guitarist Marc Kondrat and other band members chatted after the first of three sets. Six years ago, Kondrat and his friends formed a 10-member band. More accurately, they formed two bands, each with the same players, but with different names.

Locos por Juana (Crazy for Jane) is a Latin fusion band that blends cumbia, reggae, funk, rock, R&B, and hip-hop. Since releasing their first two CDs in 2002 and 2005, they have been chosen as a Billboard magazine “Hot Pick,” listed as “Best US Band” by BBC News and “Best Latin Rock Band in Miami” by the Miami New Times, and been nominated for a Latin Grammy. With all this success, the group still embraces its other band, Xperimento, which only plays at Jazid, mainly on Wednesday nights.

“Xperimento came out of Locos,” said Itagui, lead vocalist and composer, who was born in Medellín, Colombia, and came to Miami 16 years ago. “It’s underground music with lots of improvisation. Xperimento is like another hand that we’re showing to everyone.”

“We like to call Xperimento ‘music from the street,’” said Kondrat, who grew up in Miami and whose family is also from Colombia. “It’s kind of urban. We all come from countries in South

If you go . . .

Music clubs

Transit Lounge
729 Southwest 1st Ave.
Miami
305-377-4628
transitlounge.us
No cover charge.

Jazid
1342 Washington Ave.
Miami Beach
305-673-9372
jazid.net
Cover none-\$10.

Hoy Como Ayer
2212 Southwest 8th St.
Miami
305-541-2631
hoycomoayer.net
Cover: \$10-\$25, sometimes with two-drink minimum. Tapas \$4.50-\$12.

La Vena del Gusto
26 Southwest 8th St.
Miami
305-374-9177
lavenadelgusto.com
No cover. Live music Friday night only. Entrees \$8-\$16, tapas \$5-\$8.

Arturo Sandoval Jazz Club
Deauville Beach Resort
6701 Collins Ave.
Miami Beach
305-403-7565
arturosandovaljazzclub.com
Cover \$15-\$40. Dinner entrees \$14-\$32.

Band websites

Suénalo Sound System
suenalomusic.com

Xperimento/Locos por Juana
myspace.com/xperimento
locosporjuana.net

DJ Le Spam & the Spam Allstars
spamallstars.com

Ruly Y Su Havana-Kafe
raulmorera.com

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Suénalo Sound System, which formed in 2002, gets people on their feet at Jazid in Miami Beach this month.

America. What we’re trying to do is start a new genre of music called One Sound. It’s the mixture

Continued on next page

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2007 Patriots-to-Parliament Event Schedule

May 6	Norwegian Majesty kicks off her Bermuda Season
May 13	Ricky "King" Russell Band featuring Kit Holiday
June 3	Dance Like A Star Cruise
June 10	The Reminisants
June 17	Fat City Band Cruise
June 29	Karate for Kids with Doyle Family Martial Arts Academy
August 26	Guest Comedian Cruise
September 2	Irish Festival at Sea
September 9	Irish Festival at Sea

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Sounds sprung from many roots

Continued from preceding page
of all the genres of Latin music, American music, reggae, cumbia, funk, and salsa.”

And what is cumbia?
“Cumbia is a rhythm that came to Colombia from Nigeria. It’s like a heartbeat,” said Itagui. “Cumbia comes from the same roots as reggae,” Kondrat added.

They began tapping their hands on their shirts, clapping their hands, and making “shh-shh” noises in an impromptu demonstration. “We are a new generation mixing the rhythms,” said Itagui.

Another group known in Miami for mixing new rhythms is DJ LeSpam and the Spam Allstars. DJ Le Spam (the stage name of Andrew Yeomanson) formed the group in 1993 and is credited as the pioneer of the fusion music now happening in Miami.

Yeomanson describes his group’s sound as an “electronic descarga,” a Cuban jam session (descarga means unloading). As DJ Le Spam, he works turntables, sampling and mixing music from his vast record collection that includes Latin music, as well as African, reggae, funk, hip-hop, and blues. Meanwhile, seven musicians sing and play along on flute, congas, sax, guitar, timbales, and trombone. The result is a highly charged mix of rhythms irresistible to dancers.

“It looks like 2007 will be another year for expanding boundaries and trying to play new cities,” said Yeomanson. “We’re releasing a new album this spring, ‘Electrodomesticos,’ which will feature guest appearances by Pee Wee Ellis and Page McConnell. And we’ll be back in Jamaica Plain at the Milky Way in early May.”

For those who love the more traditional Cuban songs and ballads, there are several clubs, with more opening every month.

The best known, Hoy Como Ayer (Today Like Yesterday), is on Calle Ocho in the heart of Little

Havana. Both tourists and locals come to listen to artists who recall the sounds of a Havana from long ago.

On a recent Saturday night, hostess Vanessa Rubio stood at the door greeting guests with a wide smile and the reservations clipboard.

“All our performers are from Cuba. Malena [Burke] sings boleros — traditional Cuban ballads — and son Cubano — a kind of low-key salsa — and the faster charanga. That’s when people get up and dance,” she said.

Inside, the crowd is older and better dressed than at the “younger” venues. The \$25 per person cover charge and two-drink minimum ensure a different clientele.

A similar type of music can be heard — with no cover charge — at a small tapas restaurant farther down Calle Ocho, closer to downtown. In a strip mall, next to a cigar store and a Burger King, La Vena del Gusto is an unexpected find. The kitchen is open to the room, behind counter-high shelves of wine. At one end, a huge sculpture of a rooster peers down on the crowd. It’s informal, cozy, and artsy.

On Friday nights, the Cuban-born, classically trained musician Raúl Morera and his three-piece band, Ruly Y Su Havana-Kafe, entertain with guitar, electric flute, and percussive instruments that include conga, bongo, timbale, and maracas.

Morera played music that seemed straight out of the Buena Vista Social Club songbook, all traditional Cuban songs that the crowd loved and got some couples dancing between the tables. It’s more nostalgic than cutting edge, but the level of musical proficiency and Morera’s strong clear voice kept it fresh and engaging.

In a different vein, Arturo Sandoval, the Cuban trumpet player, has opened the Arturo Sandoval Jazz Club in the Deauville Beach Resort on Miami Beach. The dark, candlelit room is designed to re-

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call an era when supper clubs were sexy and sophisticated places to listen to jazz.

In addition to a roster of national and international jazz performers, the club hosts a weekly music series called Latino Meets Jazz. Created as an homage to the Salsa Meets Jazz jam sessions that

were legendary in New York in the 1980s at the Village Gate, this Tuesday night series hosts some of Miami’s finest Latin and jazz musicians, including Tomas Cruz and the Timba Allstars, Edwin Boinilla, and Lo Siento.

So, what’s up, Miami? Music and more music, everywhere.

Contact Necce Regis, a freelance writer in Boston and Miami Beach, at necceeregis@yahoo.com.



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