

barcelona big latin band



Reminding Xavier Cugat

With more than ten years of career, three records and more than two hundred performances to its backs, Barcelona Big Latin Band is one of the references of the Latin jazz in Catalonia. Led by Ramon Escalé, the band always has been willing to assume new challenges, as the assignment they received in 2007 by the festival Cruïlla de Cultures of Mataró, to prepare a repertoire with Omara Portuondo, the great lady of the afrocuban music. This production took them to make a tour with this spectacle that, aside from Mataró, appeared in the Grec Festival of Barcelona.

In 2008, with the collaboration of Produccions ContraBaix, the Barcelona Big Latin Band started up again a special production with a repertoire inspired by the legendary Catalan musician Xavier Cugat. A big band form by great latin jazz stars that embarks in an unpublished project: to vindicate the legacy of Xavier Cugat who has been very important in the afrocuban root music; although not very often has been located in the place that really deserves, the influence of his repertoire and his orchestras have been vital for a generation of musicians. The figure of Cugat, dominated by glamour and the eccentricities of the most exuberant Hollywood, has not been recognized in all its magnitude. Barcelona Latin Big Band, in the strictly musical way, wants to pay tribute to him arranging some of his great successes.

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About Xavier Cugat

He was born in Girona in 1900; his family was transferred to Havana when he was two years old. Friends of the family gave a violin to him and immediately he showed his talent as a child prodigy with music. With nine years old he was already playing the violin professionally and with twelve he was first violin of the National Theater Symphony orchestra in La Havana. Among other episodes of his biography, stands out its American tour with Enrico Caruso or his stage as illustrator in Los Angeles Times. In spite of touring around the United States and Europe with a symphony orchestra, to perform twice in the Carnegie Hall and to become the soloist of the Philharmonic of Los Angeles, Cugat was disappointed: neither the money nor the answers of the press were as he expected.

Thus, at the end of the 20s he started his first band to play commercial music, a sextet with the vocalist Carmen Castillo. Although it did not have an extraordinary repercussion, was the first step to get hired in 1933 with his dance orchestra, in the Waldorf Astoria Hotel of New York. There he achieved a great success and it was the resident band during sixteen years. Immediately, also, he managed to have his radio program three hours Saturday nights.

Its repertoire was centered basically in Latin subjects that caused that, in just a short time, he happened to be known as the King of the Rumba. He wrote and recorded hundreds of songs, among others, *Chiquita Banana*, *Rumba Rhapsody*, *Kasmiri Love Song*, *Rain in Spain*, *Babalu*, *My Shawl*, *Rendezvous in Rio*, *Is it Taboo* or *I'll Never Love Again*.

In the 40s, he leapt into the cinema sharing stage with Rita Hayworth in the movie "You Were Never Lovelier". He made diverse films with the swimmer Esther Williams. Xavier Cugat got married and divorced four times. Carmen Castillo, Lorraine Allen, Abbe Lane and Charo Baeza were the women who got married with this habitual character of the society press. Although Latin music began to be less popular from the 50s, Cugat maintained its popularity and continued performing, mainly in Las Vegas, until 1969, when his health started to be weak. At the beginning of the 70s he returned to Barcelona, where he settled down until his death, in 1990.