

LA Choro Ensemble: Brazilian Spirit and Commitment

Contributed by Bruce Gilman
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Every ensemble brings a different set of insights to great music, so it's impossible to hail any single group as offering everything. Yet there is one that has such implicit warmth that you get the feeling you're witnessing musicians playing in the privacy of their own homes rather than performing publicly.

Originally a simple gathering of friends who wanted to play music outside the traditional jazz and popular repertoire, the Los Angeles Choro Ensemble has over the past five years, proven to be a most successful aggregation.

Their subtlety and quickness of response gives the impression that not even an earthquake could disrupt their rhythmic stability or shake the absolute certainty of each player's conviction. Heard on Ted Falcon's CD *Memórias do Brasil*, their imaginative ensemble sound offers a wonderful display of instrumental bravura totally devoid of superfluous embellishment or sentiment.

Falcon, one of the few North American musicians whose work reflects a profound admiration for the Brazilian style of mandolin playing, began his career playing violin and guitar in the most commercial circles (Korn, Weezer, Suzanne Vega, The Cure) and was even the concertmaster for the Trans-Siberian Orchestra.

Having decided to take a more creative path, Falcon became involved with choro. His new CD, *Memórias do Brasil*, sets out to explore the stylistic scope as well as the compositional diversity of the genre.

Falcon is of the generation that grew up alongside the influence of artists like Jacó do Bandolim and Hamilton de Holanda, and certainly these players are almost tangible presences on his CD. Constantly changing color, character, and perspective, the recording takes listeners to the heart of choro.

There is not a low point in the entire program, and the players' musicianship and enthusiasm for this venture shines through every bar. With his own blend of rock intensity and jazz exploration, Falcon's playing and semi-jazz approach are entirely gratifying and have many virtues, commencing with a good choice of material.

From Pixinguinha to Hermeto Pascoal, the music is tightly organized, each player contributing a clearly-defined personality to his role. Pacing is excellent, with different guests giving different slants to the music on each track.

By transferring these rich harmonic and beautifully melodic conceptions from their fingers to their instruments and ultimately to the listener, Falcon, together with the supple and responsive Los Angeles Choro Ensemble, rekindles one's faith in both the past and the future of choro.

For those whose interest is now aroused, rather than simply reading about this group, you have an opportunity to hear them bring out the choro repertoire at the CD Release Party on May 31, 2006, at the Vic for Jazz in Santa Monica, in the Los Angeles area, in California.

Journalist, musician, and educator Bruce Gilman has served as music editor of *Brazzil* magazine, an international monthly publication based in Los Angeles, for close to a decade. During that time he has written scores of articles on the most influential Brazilian artists and genres, program notes for festivals in the United States and abroad, numerous CD liner notes, and an essay, "The Politics of Samba," that appeared in the *Georgetown Journal*.

He is the recipient of three government grants that allowed him to research traditional music in China, India, and Brazil. His articles on Brazilian music have been translated and published in Dutch, German, Portuguese, Serbian, and Spanish. You can reach him through his e-mail: cuica@interworld.net.