



Pedro Giraudó Jazz Orchestra's New CD Release, *EL VIAJE*, is Bold and Beautiful, a Journey to Savor.

With the release of *El Viaje* on April 7, 2009, Argentine composer, arranger and bassist **Pedro Giraudó** further solidifies his reputation as one of New York City's most creative and daring bandleaders. The session, his fourth as a leader, finds his 12-piece jazz orchestra in dazzling form, roaring with laser-focused precision through a set of original works that defy conventional big band thinking and strike out on a stylistic path of its own. It's not surprising that Giraudó has already made a big impression on some of the country's most seasoned music critics. Peter Watrous, for one, writing in *Descarga*, raves about Giraudó's exceptionally talented ensemble and his writing and arranging skills, terming the band's riveting performances "modern jazz and Latin music at its best."

The use of a journey, real or imagined, as a metaphor has long served writers, poets, composers and filmmakers. In Giraudó's case, *El Viaje* could serve as an effective reference in a number of ways. The cultural transition he has made in relocating from his home in provincial Argentina to the very heart of the jazz culture in New York City has been a journey in every sense of the word. It could also allude to his ever evolving talents as a musician. But this trip was something extra special -- the emotional passage he and his wife Marianela lived through in the months leading up to and following the birth of Vera, their first child. The feelings of excitement, fear, anxiety, restlessness and nostalgia the couple experienced became the perfect emotions to translate into the arresting music that forms the core repertoire of *El Viaje*.

"It's very complex," Giraudó says of his contrapuntal writing, a technique that uses two or more voices that are independent in rhythm and contour but interdependent in harmony. "But," he adds, "we're at the point where everyone knows what the others are playing. That helps make it very clean." While some think of his group as a big band, and Duke Ellington and Carla Bley are frequently mentioned as influences, Giraudó also sees his unit as different from that tradition. "My thinking is much more 'chamber' than 'big band,'" he explains. "I rarely think about sections. When I think of Carla Bley, I consider that a kind of symphonic writing while with my band, it's more of a chamber concept.

Ironically, although he has become a big Ellington fan, when he arrived in the U.S. he knew little of North American jazz. "Actually, I had no clue who Duke Ellington, Monk or Coltrane were when I moved to New York," he readily admits. "When I started studying with David Berger while I was working on my undergraduate degree at the Manhattan School of Music, I thought that Duke Ellington was Dizzy Gillespie -- that's how lost I was. I finally learned that he was not the guy with the big cheeks! I was exposed to all of that music over here."

Giraudó was born in Córdoba, Argentina's second largest city, located about 500 miles northwest of cosmopolitan Buenos Aires. His father was a symphony orchestra conductor, and he grew up listening to a lot of classical music and a sprinkling of tango, Brazilian music and North American jazz. But it was mostly, as he recalls, "hearing a lot of horrible pop music" as a teen. He started playing electric bass at the age of 16, beginning with rock but quickly switching to jazz fusion when he developed an ear for artists like Chick Corea's Elektric Band, guitarist Mike Stern and drummer Dave Weckl.

Except for occasionally traveling to Buenos Aires to take private bass lessons, he went to New York straight from his home city in 1996 without having had an opportunity to soak up the cultural influences of Argentina's glamorous capital. "I really became more appreciative of my country's indigenous and urban styles after I moved to the U.S.," the composer states. "In Argentina, young people listen to pop music. For them, it is the national music. It's not like in Cuba where everyone listens to Cuban music. In Argentina, few young people listen to folkloric styles. So, when I arrived in the U.S., I had limited knowledge of tango. I learned about it here."

After switching to upright bass and finishing a Masters Degree in Jazz Performance at City College of New York, Giraudo embarked on a busy career as a sideman, playing, as he says, everywhere from Carnegie Hall to restaurant gigs. He has worked and traveled the world with such jazzmen as saxophonist Kenny Garrett and trombonist William Cepeda, with renowned Argentine musicians including Pablo Ziegler, Fernando Otero, and Daniel Binelli, and with Cuban, Colombian and Venezuelan music groups.

The current incarnation of his jazz orchestra began five years ago. "The band I had about seven years ago had just one trumpet, one trombone and two saxophones," he explains. "As my composition evolved, I doubled the size of the brass and reed sections, to its current size of twelve. I've had the good fortune of working with the same musicians over the years; they've evolved with me, which is part of what gives the band its sound."

As the nine tracks on **El Viaje** attest, Giraudo is first and foremost a composer and arranger. The sheer bravura of his works, with their searing rhythmic intensity and haunting themes, confirm that the Argentine musician is indeed worthy of mention in the same breath as Ellington, Bley, Evans and other large ensemble alchemists. "In terms of composition, I'm pretty much self-taught," he confides. "I took several classes with Dr. David Bushler about the history of symphony and choral music, and although it wasn't about composition specifically, I learned a lot about how all of the great classical composers thought and the devices they used."

While tango as such is seldom overtly present in his works, Giraudo employs the sentiments of his country's most famous cultural export in effective ways. "The element of tango that I use is the emotional quality of the music," he explains, "the melancholy and the sadness. And in the first movement of the '**El Viaje**' suite, for instance, there certainly is a strong influence of tango with some obviously very Piazzolla-esq things."

Word is spreading of Giraudo's unique sound. This past October, the entire ensemble was flown to China to do one concert. The musician himself is going to Japan this spring to rehearse local musicians and then perform concerts of his repertoire, and he would like to take the same concept on the road to Argentina.

Currently, he's working on an hour's worth of new music, thanks to a composing grant received from New York City's Jazz Gallery. It will be performed later in the year. "I'll probably let it mature for a year and then record it," the composer adds.

In the meantime, there's **El Viaje**, with its bounty of stunningly performed masterworks to savor. "Although all of this music has a personal meaning to me," Giraudo says, "I always have in mind that it should speak to everyone."

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Critical Acclaim

From **Peter Watrous**, former music critic, *The New York Times*, who now reviews for www.descarga.com, one of the largest and highly respected online Latin music sites. Pedro Giraudo's CD "Desconsuelo" was his "Editor's Pick" in March of 2006, with this review:

"Part of a growing trend of New York based Latin American composers to use their jazz training to incorporate music from their homelands, Desconsuelo is a special piece of work. It's broad, dramatic and majestic. Giraudo's arrangements draw from early Ellington, and Gil Evans, and modern big band orchestration and work over traditional rhythms from Argentina. The band's made up of American musicians, and they take on the music and leave it perfectly realized. There are elements of tango, and classical music and jazz; at times the music sounds like a Carla Bley project. Giraudo plays bass, but his instrument really is the band. **This is modern jazz and Latin music at its best.**"

Peter Watrous Selected Desconsuelo as one of his 2006 Picks for Descarga.com

From the June 2006 issue of **Encore**, the program magazine for Brooklyn Academy of Music and other performing arts venues around the country, by **Jeffrey Hildt**, the magazine's CD critic:

"Remember the name Pedro Giraudo. At least remember his nickname, Mr. Vivo, which is also the name of his excellent 13-piece jazz band. If all else fails, play this remarkable new CD once—you won't forget it. The experience is exhilarating. Giraudo is a talent that deserves to emerge onto the front ranks of the jazz scene. While he bills his music as Latin-based, the influence is South American. He is originally from Cordoba, Argentina, where Latin means tango, if it means anything. But make no mistake; this is, without qualification, innovative and exciting jazz. Two antecedents come to mind: Gerry Mulligan and Charles Mingus. Both remade what a previous generation would have called the big band sound, and both did it with lighter, tighter forces and distinctive, modern charts. Giraudo picks up that torch and runs with it. With a sound that is loose and relaxed, yet arranged throughout, soloists often jump out of the pack, playfully injecting their personality into the proceedings (Mingus). At other times, the influence is clearly classical, the performances virtuosic. And the music always swings (Mulligan). Giraudo loves to produce sounds you don't expect; horns doubled with a bit of voice, a percussive bass rumbling from the piano. A good bass player, Giraudo is a bandleader of great promise. **Desconsuelo is one of the best jazz recordings of the year.**"

Bass World (the Magazine of the International Society of Bassists)

"A mature artistic project inside and out (compelling cover art), Pedro Giraudo's Desconsuelo is a terrific CD. Bassist and composer Giraudo has assembled a killer band to record this rich material. This is Latin-jazz style concert music, and though there are parts one could dance to, it is not dance music, per se. The first three tracks, Mate Amargo, Con Un Nudo En La Garganta, and La Bronca are listed under the title, as if three movements of, Desconsuelo, and the tracks are segued as one — a tour de force that leaves the listener breathless. Giraudo's writing is beautiful and exhilarating, with a lot of duple against triple rhythms, layered and contrapuntal melodic lines and exciting riffs. These are riot easy pieces to play, yet the band members make the ensemble passages sound effortless, then turn around and blow dynamite solos. Check out the sax solo on La Viudita or the fugue in Ese Grito to hear an example of the band rising to the challenge of the composition.

The four-piece rhythm section is tight, and Giraudo's bass playing is the solid underpinning. Though at times it seemed the drums and percussion were mixed too far back. Besides a thoroughly grooving rhythm section (of course), the horn riffs really "make" the tunes. The way the riffs are written, with greater or lesser tension through consonance and dissonance as well as the band's execution of them, create a lot of excitement and energy. All of the soloists are tremendous, but pianist Jess Jurkovic is a standout. He demonstrates an excellent clarity of ideas, for example, his solo on *Contrapuntren*. His comping is supportive and inventive as well. This is the kind of recording that is very listenable on several levels: one can just pop it in and enjoy the overall energy and sonorities or one can listen more deeply — there is a lot to this music for the "serious musician." Additionally, if you like what you hear enough to want to try it for yourself, Giraudo's sheet music is available for purchase on the website above..., if you dare! The music on *Desconsuelo* has such a great spirit; it is fun, exciting, bold, and at times wistful. The band seems to be taking chances, yet it's tight, too — a sometimes elusive, but great effect."

— *Review by Chris Kosky*

Time Out NY – Top live show

"Argentine bassist Pedro Giraudo no longer calls his group *Mr. Vivo*, but that doesn't mean his current amalgam is less immediate than its predecessor (*vivo*, by the way, is Spanish for "live"). Given the quantum leap in acuity and splendor that Giraudo's arranging displayed on last year's *Deconsuelo* (PGM), not only was he due for a marquee change, his vision had also expanded on a more tangible level: What was once an octet now checks in at a heftier 13 pieces. It would be easy for a bassist to become hidden in the orchestral tug-of-war between brass and reeds, but Giraudo's rhythmic ballast assures that his presence is felt even though he rarely takes a solo. The band's size also allows the Cordoba-bred composer to reveal even more of his South American heritage without engaging in pastiche. He's always been interested in folk songs, tango and the like, but on *Deconsuelo* Giraudo applies rich, classically oriented figures and harmonies to offset simple melodies, and the percussion-augmented rhythm section employs native pulses so guilelessly that the result almost sounds straight-ahead. The whole harks back those historic Latin American-flavored collaborations between Carla Bley and Charlie Haden, and Giraudo also seems to have learned a thing or two from them about assembling bands. Much has been said about how the scene is overrun with technically facile young musicians, and Giraudo's assemblage suggests that what audiences and great sidemen need is a few more ace conceptualists."

— *Review K. Leander Williams*