



**Ned Sublette  
Cowboy Rumba 51:51**

What do you get when you cross a west Texan singer-songwriter, who was raised on the pop music traditions of Buddy Holly, bilingualism, and a determined cry-in-your-beer mentality, with rich polyrhythmic percussive lines, replete with claves, maracas, conga drums, and blazing Latin brass? What do you get when this son-of-Lubbock musician, who upon traveling to Cuba fell in love with the swing and sway presence of the rumba, guanguanco, and merengue rhythms of the local folk? What do you get when cheatin' and drinkin' songs are set against the power and flair of salsa music? You get the amazing recording *Cowboy Rumba* by Ned Sublette.

From Louisiana, Texas, and New Mexico, Sublette moved to New York in the mid-seventies. Combining his country and western roots with the local emergent punk scene, his musical sense of amalgamation quickly went beyond the mere country punk music he was performing at CBGB's and other venues when he heard the Afro-Cuban sounds that were pervasive throughout New York City. Besides Latin music, it was about this time that Sublette also became interested in the many influences of African music on the musics of the US and Caribbean. He ultimately became a co-producer of the influential public radio program, *Afropop Worldwide*.

In 1990 Sublette traveled to Cuba and fell in love with the dynamic of Cuban music. Recognizing the unparalleled vibrancy of the music and its noted lack of distribution in the US, Sublette co-founded the Qbadisc record label to promote the works of Cuban artists such as Los Munequito De Matanzas, Celinda Gonzalez, Issac Delgado and "Maraca" Valle. It was just a matter of time before the infectious sounds of Afro-Cuban music would seep into his west Texas traditionalism.

There is a tendency to assume that the mixture of Country & Western music and Afro-Cuban pop would be nothing more than novelty music. Not in this case. Sublette's definitive twang, and country-clique story telling fit perfectly with the exquisite musicianship of the all-star Latin musicians: pianists "Professor Joe Torres (long compatriot of Willie Colon) and Lisandro Arias (whose work with Latin pop artist Frankie Negron is extraordinary); bassist Ruben Rodriguez (The Pizzacado Five, Earl Klugh), percussionists Jimmy Delgado (Tito Puente, Celia Cruz), Johnny Alemdra (Mongo

Robby Ameen on drums. With legendary salsa engineer Jon Fausty at the controls, this recording is anything but a novelty. It's the real deal.

For instance, the merengue rhythm supporting the opening cut, "Ghost Riders in the Sky," is authentic. Arranged by instrumentalist extraordinaire, Ramon Orlando, the frenzied work of congaist, Nick Andujar, tamboroist, Cuchi Paula, and pedal guitarist, Lloyd Maines, drive this traditional western tune to new heights. Similarly Orlando's arrangement is first-rate on Sublette's "Ready To Be." Danceable, the tune vacillates between a belly-rubbing two-step and a propulsive crazed mambo. At one moment contemplative, the next liberating and wild.

Perhaps the most authentic Latin piece on this recording is Sublette's version of Buddy Holly's "Not Fade Away." The great Cuban rumba group Los Munequitos De Matanzas performs this hardcore rumba. Over a cacophonous percussion unit, Sublette shouts the lyrics of Holly's tune. Gone is the familiar Bo Diddley beat. It is replaced with a polyrhythmic call and response refrain between instrumentalists and Sublette, sometimes in English, mostly in Spanish.

This extraordinary album ends with Sublette's "Cowboy Rumba." Complete with the dust and sweat of west Texas, it takes little imagination to figure out what this cow-poke is talking about—a cantina, Miss La Rosa, "doing the Cowboy Rumba on a Saturday night." The imagery and great music make this poor mid-westerner want to seek out this place "just south Albuquerque," to seek out this great band and to enjoy the hot days and cool nights blanketed by this Latin beat.

Sublette has concocted a truly compelling work, evocative and easily able to sustain repeated listening. Pick this one up today. ☑



**Olu Dara  
In the World: From Natchez to New York 46:57**

Dara is a cornetist and guitarist who has performed with the likes of Art Blakey, Cassandra Wilson, Brian Eno, Taj Mahal and "Blood" Ulmer. On this recording, he delicately balances these musical influences and presents a recording which some claim is the best jazz album, others say the best blues,

while others say the best world music recording of 1998. There is really no reason to split so many hairs. This recording is just plain great throughout.

Opening with a greasy Afropop-tinged, gullah-rhythm tune, "Okra" could be a song sung by fruit and vegetable vendors in the Deep South. Hawking their wares as they sing and saunter through the streets, this tune compels the listener to kick back and concentrate on the images Dara mixes between his sensual lyricism and understated cornet blowing.

Similarly on "Rain Shower", the slow lopping tempo clearly draws a picture of late afternoon showers found on the Gulf. Like those showers, Dara's imagery is steamy, hot yet cool, a subtle painful relief. "Ain't got no umbrella...but I'm going to be sliding home in the mud to you." Indeed the groove of this marvelous tune makes one want to play in the goo, to let thing squish between ones toes (Damn, I'm taking the day off!).

"Natchez Shopping Blues" again is lyric-driven. It's Dara's ability to mix images and perspectives in wonderfully unique ways that give this

tune its appeal. "I've been shopping...I bought my mind and soul on the river...my heart in Nashville, Tennessee...my legs on the ocean...arms on the seven seas...eyes in Brooklyn...but the love I got in Natchez, lord got it free."

One might have heard the great love song "Your Lips" on the radio. Again the metaphors are exquisite: "Your lips, Your lips, Your lips are juicy...like Louisiana plums." Couple with a swaying Caribbean rhythm and Dara's subtle cornet lines, this tune is down right sensual.

Dara's cornet work is strong on "Harlem Country Girl." Continuing his laid-back extended point of view, the cornet riff draws the listener into this jazz-laced narrative about sweet love in the hot city. "Zora" is an oblique song referring to the life of famed author Zora Neale Hurston, someone just too much for Harlem (and maybe the US as well).

On "Jungle Jay" Dara performs with his son, rap artist Nas. With Dara's cornet work supporting a slow rap line, the result is reminiscent of something Miles Davis might have concocted—truly a mixing of perspectives from Natchez to New York. ☑