

Music

Rotation

Wepa!

From Los Tigres to
Daddy Yankee

BY OLIVIA FLORES
ALVAREZ

Latin music is as varied and genre-bending as any other. As an example, here are reviews of four CDs that have absolutely nothing in common, except that they go under the "Latin" heading at the record store.

Los Tigres del Norte Detalles y Emociones

Fonovisa

The average unsuspecting gringo has no idea: Across Latin America, Los Tigres del Norte are huge. Regularly selling out stadiums of more than 80,000 seats, registering global sales of over 32 million records — yeah, that kind of huge. Playing continuously for close to 40 years now, the five-piece band still features the core original members: the four Hernández brothers (Jorge, Hernán, Eduardo and Luis) and their cousin, Oscar Lara. Over an output that averages something like 1.4 records per year, Los Tigres have established themselves as the leading performers of *norteño*, although occasionally touching on rancheras, cumbia and ballads.

Detalles y Emociones is something like the group's 56th album (really), and it effortlessly defends Los Tigres' near-

LOS TIGRES DEL NORTE



DETALLES Y EMOCIONES

Los Tigres have put out 50-plus albums. Really.

mythological position as the fiercest cats in regional Mexican music. To untrained ears, this is at first bouncy, relentlessly cheerful music, a style driven by the oompah of a syncopated 12-string guitar and rollicking accordion. But the lyrics reveal more nuanced emotions, often with a bittersweet intonation, valuing family, true friends and honest effort. The catchiest tune here is also the most overtly political: "El Muro," which is a no-holds-barred attack on Bush-backed immigration "reform," is a lament that accuses the American president of missing the point.

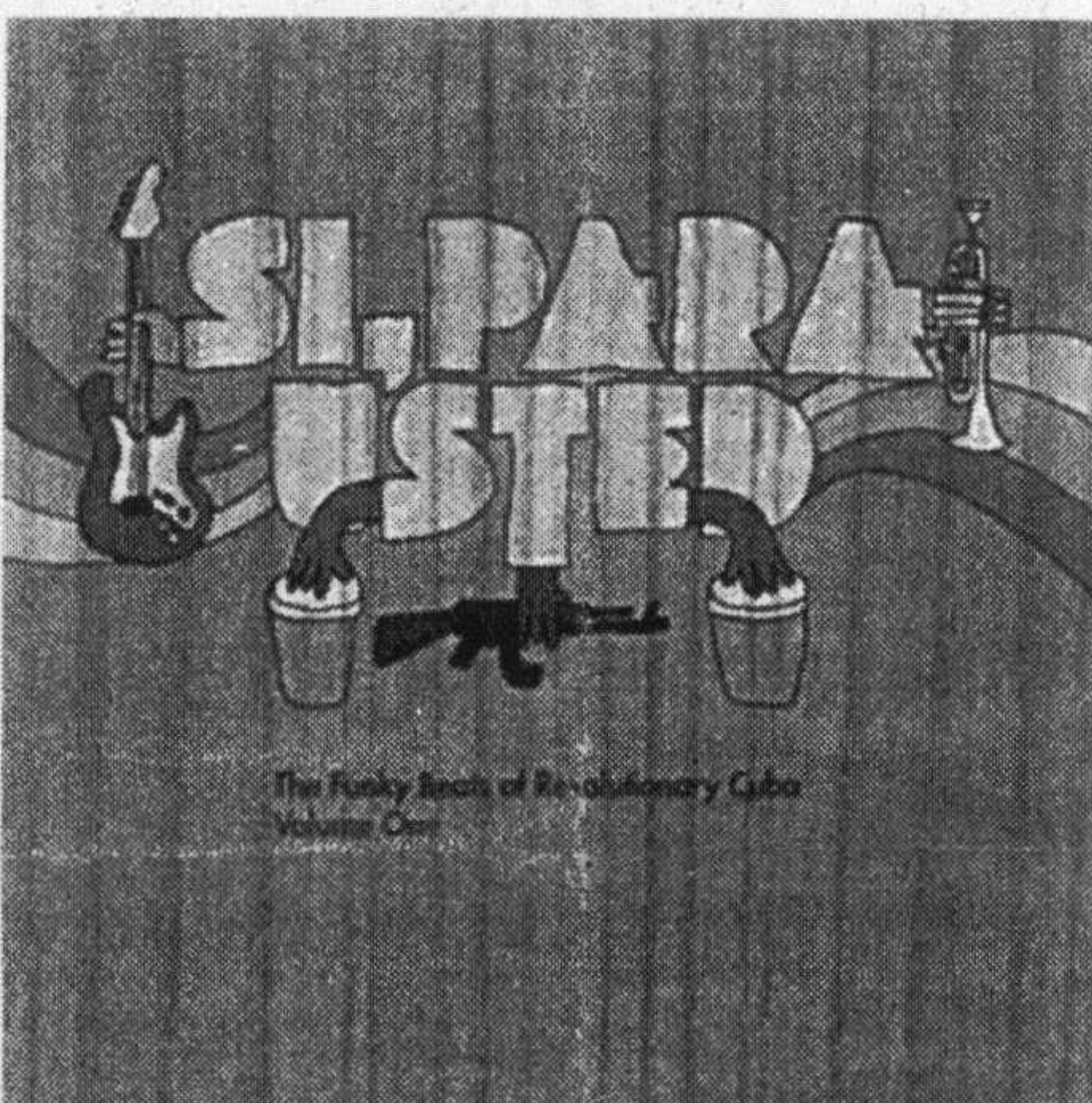
4, 2007 houstonpress.com

"Better to build a bridge," Jorge urges in Spanish. "Just as you see us in the country, you also see us in offices / You know you need us on your team / And even in the kitchen." It's not surprising that this is also the only song with a bit of spoken English (and on a bonus version, French, German and even Farsi). It's relatively fiery rhetoric, but the best *norteño* has historically been socially engaged. From a group that remains the best of the best, we'd expect nothing less. — Arielle Castillo

Various artists Si Para Usted: The Funky Beats of Revolutionary Cuba

Waxing Deep

During the '70s, a slew of Cuban songwriters and musicians who had their ears tuned to illegal radio from the States started blending Afro-Cuban music with the sounds of American soul and funk. In this collection, compiled by music historian Dan Zacks, who found some of the source



American funk meets Afro-Cuban rhythms, a combo even Castro couldn't stop.

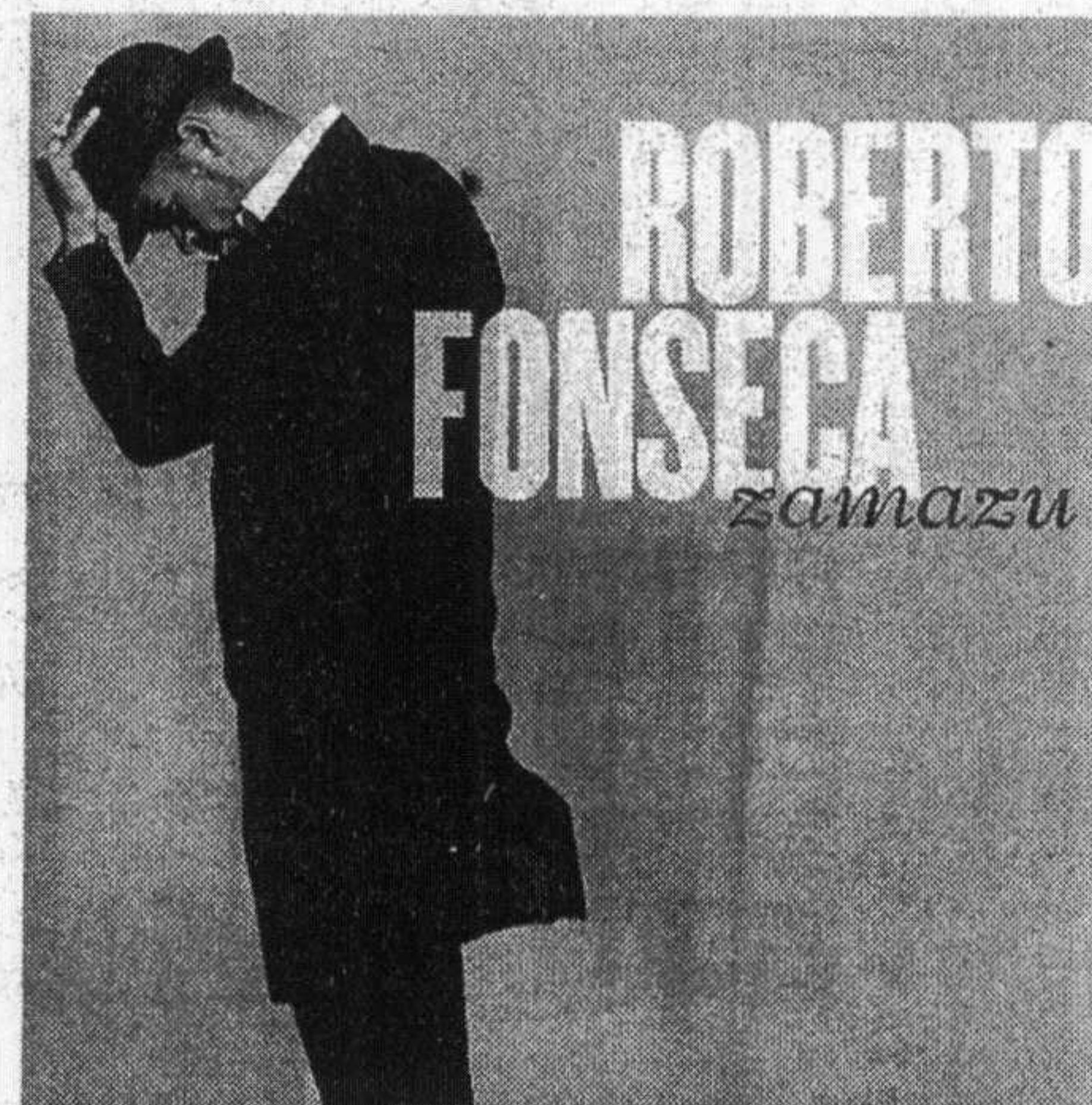
tapes in a warehouse in Havana, we hear what could arguably be called the roots of Cuban jazz fusion, where electric guitars and keyboards meet the rich, lively percussion that so characterizes the music of that country. Among the disc's highlights are Mirtha y Raul's "Casina y Epidecus," which employs Middle Eastern instruments and an eerie movie-trailer-like narration, and Irakere's "Bacalao con Pan," an electric, guitar-based track with plenty of brass that brings the arrangements of the late Arif Mardin to mind (Irakere, by the way, featured now-legendary Paquito D'Rivera, Chucho Valdés and Arturo Sandoval). — Ernest Barteldes

Roberto Fonseca Zamazu

Justin Time/Enja

Although a member of Buena Vista Social Club (in 2001, at the tender age of 26, he replaced legend Rubén González) right up until the group's final recordings, Cuban pianist Roberto Fonseca is not at all interested in having his music viewed as nostalgia. Though certainly respectful of the various traditions that serve as influence to him, Fonseca is a forward-looking player. And a global one, too. Although the Cuban flavors are omnipresent on his latest disc, *Zamazu*, there are also sonic spices emanating from Argentina, Brazil, the Middle East, Eastern Europe and the far-out world of late-'60s jazz and funk. Fonseca handles them all deftly, with a percussive and fluid piano attack that occasionally verges into rock and roll territory but always remains both elegant and thick with emotional

integrity. Quieter numbers like "Suspiro" and "Llego Cachaito" (featuring legendary



Ex-Buena Vista Social Club member
Fonseca delivers a remarkable CD.

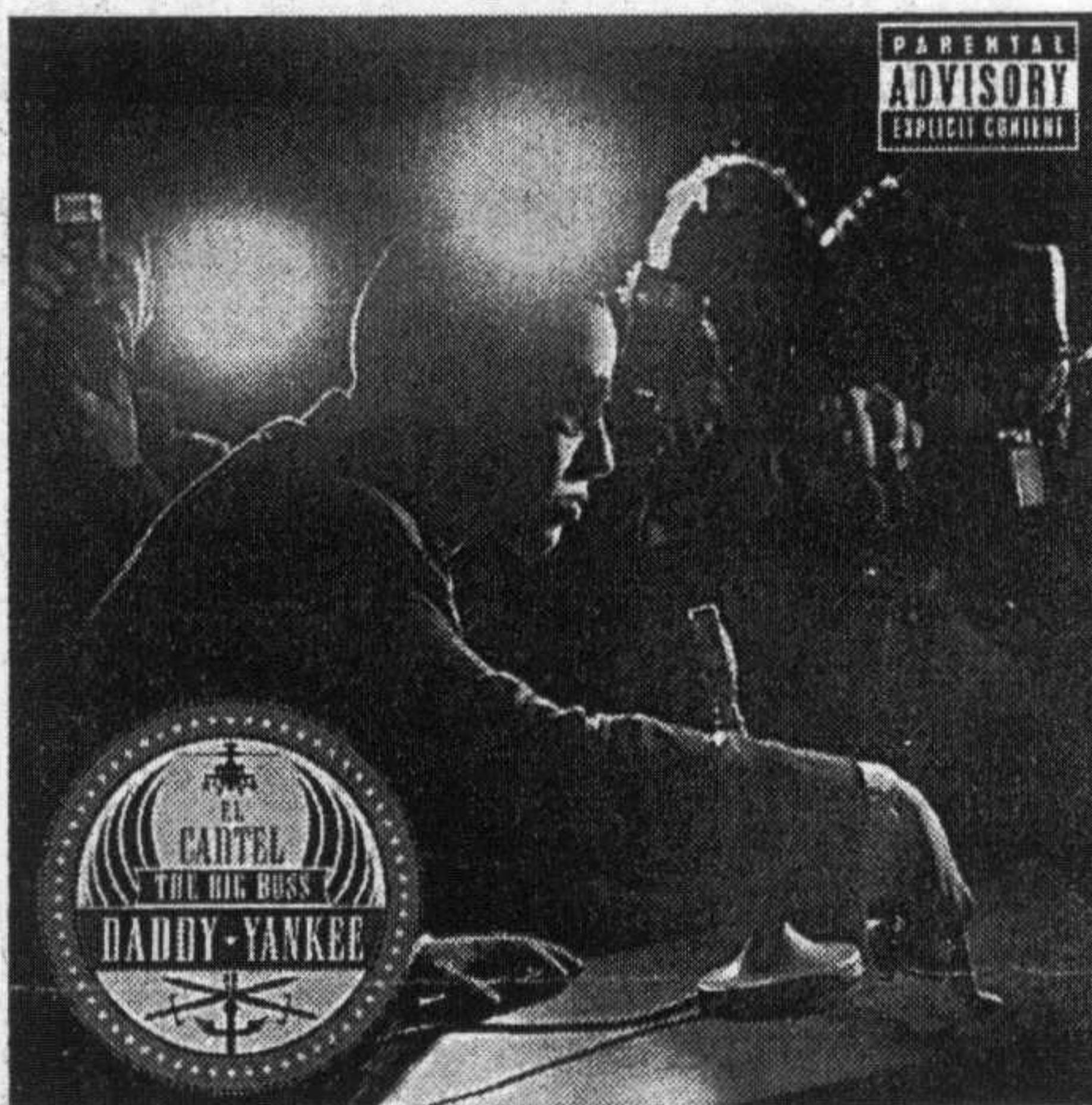
Cuban bassist Orlando "Cachaito" López) show Fonseca's soft, slightly melancholic side, but it's on complex pieces like the atmospheric "Ishmael," the brief, hard-driving "Así Baila Mi Madre" and the pan-ethnic "Congo Arabe" that the pianist shines most brightly. A remarkable and diverse album. — Jason Ferguson

Daddy Yankee El Cartel: The Big Boss

El Cartel/Interscope

Daddy Yankee doesn't seem to have gotten the memo that reggaetón is supposed to be over. Because on *El Cartel: The Big Boss*, the fiery Puerto Rican rapper acts like the party's just begun. While detractors continue to proclaim the genre's premature death, this proper follow-up to 2004's "Gasolina"-powered smash *Barrio Fino* is a welcome reminder of what initially made reggaetón feel so vibrant and fresh.

For one thing, *The Big Boss* keeps its sights firmly on the dance floor — it's a bouncy, adventurous mix of dancehall, hip-hop and salsa meant for hot summer parties and slow drives in souped-up lowriders. But thankfully, the rhythmic inventiveness never gets in the way of the fun, and it all comes together on the Scott Storch-produced "Impacto Remix." By all accounts this track shouldn't really work



Even a phoned-in guest appearance by Fergie doesn't detract from Daddy Yankee's groove.

— it has a big, cheesy vocoder chorus; grandiose, operatic string arrangements; and a phoned-in guest appearance by Fergie. But you'll still focus on Yankee's dynamic rhyming style, fiercely holding the song's divergent elements together while breathlessly soliciting Fergie "to just grind it up" over a furious reggaetón rid-dim. — José Davila