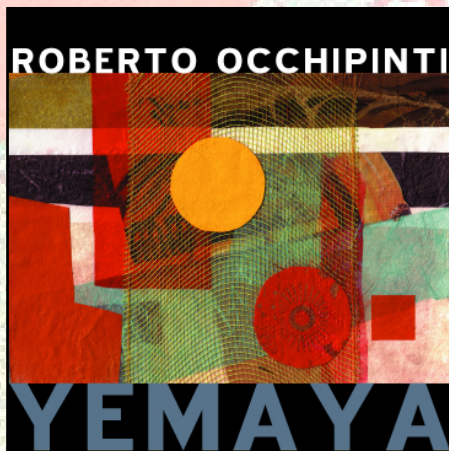


YEMAYA

ROBERTO OCCHIPINTI



Rare is the bassist who steps forward to lead his own ensemble. Rarer still is the bandleader who successfully bridges the worlds of jazz and classical music. Roberto Occhipinti clearly belongs to that rare breed. On his first album, 2001's *Trinacria*, Occhipinti explored the range of Latin jazz through works by Thelonious Monk, Cuban piano virtuoso Hilario Durán and his own compositions. His follow up album, 2003's *The Cusp*, expanded on the concept, adding violin, flutes, reeds and horns while tackling composers as diverse as Wayne Shorter, Jimi Hendrix and Giacomo Puccini. Now, with *Yemaya*, Occhipinti has given full flight to his musical vision, employing horns, a string quartet and a full string symphony orchestra on classical arrangements of Cuban, Brazilian and original jazz pieces. It's an inspired synthesis.

The album opens with "Maracatres" by Brazilian pianist Jovino Santos-Neto, in which saxophonist Phil Dwyer's fluttering solo floats over a swelling ocean of horns and strings. The breezy title track has bata drummer Pedro Martinez singing a warm homage to the goddess of sea and nature in the Afro-Cuban religion while Moscow's Globalis Symphony lend rich orchestral accompaniment. Equally striking is the sumptuous string arrangement of the gentle ballad "A Ilha" (The Island), by popular Brazilian singer-songwriter Djavan, to which Kevin Turcotte adds an achingly sweet flugelhorn solo. The next three compositions come from two of Occhipinti's most talented and trusted collaborators: Durán provides "The Shadow" and "Herbie's Mood", a playful piece inspired by Herbie Hancock, while Dwyer contributes "Bernardo's Tango," a sensuous tribute to Italian film director Bernardo Bertolucci.

Occhipinti pays a few tributes of his own—all of them to drummers. Having previously dedicated numbers to percussionists Horacio Hernandez (on *Trinacria*'s "El Negro") and Dafnis Prieto (on *The Cusp*'s "Prieto Azul"), here Occhipinti gives his respectful nod to drummers Mark McLean on the percolating "Mank", to Ernesto Simpson on the moody "El Otro Tipo" and to the late Pancho Quinto on the spiritual "Yambu". The latter, in particular, is deeply moving, as the bassist bids a heartfelt farewell to the legendary Cuban musician whom he called a friend, colleague and teacher. On all three numbers, Occhipinti's gifts as a writer, arranger and soloist are on full display.

Born in Toronto of Sicilian ancestry, Occhipinti has long straddled the worlds of jazz and classical music. As a classical bassist, he has been a member of the Winnipeg Symphony, Hamilton Philharmonic and Canadian Opera Company orchestras. Meanwhile, Occhipinti has toured and recorded with Blue Note recording artist Jane Burnett on three of her albums, including the Juno Award winning *Ritmo and Soul* and the Grammy nominated *Alma de Santiago*. At the same time, he has recorded a trio of albums with Hilario Durán, including the Juno Award winning *New Danzon*, which the bassist also produced. Two other ventures saw him tour with experimental hip-hop stars Gorillaz and perform with Damon Albarn, front man of British rockers Blur, on the critically acclaimed *Mali Music* project.

With the ambitious *Yemaya*, Occhipinti has skillfully brought those worlds together, marrying his classical training with his abiding passion for Latin jazz and world music. In doing so, he has set himself apart as an innovator, as well as one of Canada's most versatile and adventurous musicians. ~ Nicholas Jennings

Imagination, versatility and technical excellence are all adjectives that describe Canadian bassist, Roberto Occhipinti. Long recognized for his chameleon-like ability to dig in to almost any musical form, it is in his love and enthusiasm for Latin jazz that he burns brightest.




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ALMA Records

260 Adelaide St. E. Suite 10
Toronto, Ontario, M5A 1N1, Canada
Tel: 416.494.2562 Fax: 416.494.2030
info@almarecords.com

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Jane Harbury Publicity

90A Isabella St. 2nd Floor - Toronto, ON, M4Y 1N4, Canada
Office Tel: (416) 960 - 1568
jane@harbury.ca

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