

All Music Guide Review

by Michael G. Nastos

As a classically trained musician, it should be no surprise that bassist Roberto Occhipinti would join symphonic strings and horns alongside his inclination for playing Latin and contemporary jazz. This session is in full bloom, an innovative and exhilarating project in many ways, and beautifully organic. It is notable that these recordings were done in three different locals -- Occhipinti's native Toronto, Ontario, Canada; Moscow, Russia; and Havana, Cuba. This lends to the overall beauty of music culled from thousand-year-old traditions, multicultural vistas, and earthy Afro-Cuban centrist leanings. With the renowned Russian-based **Globalis Symphony Orchestra**, Occhipinti and his sextet turn the folkloric title track into a breezy waltz, with the Yoruban chant-like vocals of **Pedro Martinez**. The orchestra dominates Occhipinti's simple and bright "El Otro Tipo," and both of these tunes feature the **Michael Brecker**-like tenor sax of **Phil Dwyer**. They also play a languid and oceanic version of **Djavan's** Brazilian pop tune "A Ilha" (aka "The Island"). During the lone cut with **the Music Toronto String Quartet**, "Maracatres" evokes warm beach images and tall, majestic, green sea waves. It's a highly arranged, lucid, and current sound à la **Gil Evans**, **Maria Schneider**, or **Bob Mintzer's** big bands, plus an intro and solo feature by Occhipinti, beautiful flute work from **Les Allt**, and the strings singing with the horns. □□Pianist **Hilario Durán** is a constant factor in bringing the orchestral quality out of the overall approach. He offers some two-fisted piano chords as a buoy on the seductive "Bernardo's Tango," with a cha-cha flavor under **Allt**, the bass clarinet of **John Johnson**, and the muted trumpet of **Kevin Turcotte**. "Yambu" is a straight traditional piece dedicated to the late **Pancho Quinto** with group vocals, and **Durán** delivers again on the stylish "Herbie's Mood," an **Allt/Occhipinti** overview in tribute to **Herbie Hancock**. The strongest track is "Mank," a complex layered piece in 5/4 time that jumps out of the speakers, saturated with dizzying counterpoint, mixing meters as it rolls along and showing an involvement and discipline that mark these players as more skilled than their lesser-known reputations might suggest. Two thumbs up should be especially credited to the excellent drummer **Dafnis Prieto**. This is a CD Occhipinti has likely been eager to produce and showcase, and should be very proud of. Offering some of Europe and North America's most exciting modern-day music combinations, *Yemaya* is a recording that everyone should own.