

Carlitos Del Puerto

Chick Corea

Russ Davis: Welcome to episode number 3 of Music Magic with Chick Corea! You're listening to the song "Portals to Forever" from Chick's latest release on Stretch/Concord records, titled The Vigil. In this podcast Chick introduces his new bass player, Carlitos Del Puerto. Hailing from Havana, Cuba and son of the original bass player from the legendary Irekere Band, Carlitos tells the inside story of getting the gig with Chick and the Vigil, and much more.

Later on we'll tell you musicians about a very special online, live and interactive Chick Corea Music Workshop coming March 2014. You can learn all about that now by visiting our website at ChickCoreaWorkshops.com. Now, check out the conversation between Chick Corea and Carlitos Del Puerto. Take it away Chick!

Chick Corea: Welcome back to Vigil Broadcast Podcast Radio. Here we go. I'll welcome, for the first time, if you're just listening in. This is Chick – Chick Corea. We've been discussing the making of The Vigil recording. We're on tour right now in Japan. On this particular broadcast I'd like to present to you, our newest member, Carlitos Del Puerto. An incredible young man from Havana, Cuba via Los Angeles whose filling the bass chair quite creatively and enthusiastically, I'm happy to say. So I figured it'd be nice to have a chat with Carlitos. Get a feel of what we're doing. Here it is! Me and Carlitos, our chat.

So we're rolling, yeah, good. These little interviews with you and the rest of the guys are kind of a promotion and getting everyone understanding what's going to happen and give them a little bit of information and basically introducing everybody in the band. 'Cause you weren't on the record but now you're here – you are playing and the band is jellin' together.

Carlitos Del Puerto: I'm having such a great time.

CC: I'm glad. Me too, man! I'm happy to have you here.

CDP: It's such a learning experience for me. Just the be around you and get to share the stage with you. It's really an honor for me.

CC: Me too! I'm learning stuff. You came in and made a nice connection with everybody. Bringing in your experience and stuff. Even yesterday, we started writing a tune and it's nice!

CDP: That's going to be a good one. It's going to be fun!

CC: Where did you come up with that bass line? That's just something you invented or is it a standard form?

CDP: No, no. What happened was that I heard you play a chord. You played a chord that had that tritone in it, you know?

CC: Oh, I see.

CDP: And I said, "Okay," [hums bass line] and we were playing a Latin groove, I guess. And I just played it and you – "What is that?" And I was like, "I don't know."

CC: Oh, I see, I see. And then somehow Charles – we started playing that lick and Charles went off into his association with Ornette's tune.

CDP: With Ornette. Right. And he actually got me thinking about it and really looking for the song and "Oh man, I don't want Chick to think that I stole that lick." I'd really never heard that song before.

CC: Yeah, when he mentioned it I realize what he – cause I know the song – I realize what he was doing. You should check it out. "Lonely Woman" by Ornette. So I started writing the lick that we put together and I called it "Not Ornette's Theme."

[Both laugh]

CDP: That's a good title. That would help a lot.

CC: Yeah, and we see where the connection comes from. Okay so lets see, what would people be interested – Carlitos tell me a little bit about, just briefly, about your background. I'd like to know too. You were born in Havana?

CDP: Yeah, I was born in Havana. My father is a musician as well. He was actually in a really famous Cuban band called "Irekere."

CC: Oh, Irekere! Right, that's right. And he was the bassist.

CDP: He's the bass player.

CC: I probably met him!

CDP: Yeah! He played with you on a couple of jams.

CC: That's right.

CDP: He brought a picture to the house and here you were on the piano and he was like "Man, Chick Corea!" So I used to see all these Cuban musicians that are really famous around the world right now, and they used to hang out at the house. Chucho, Arturo Sandoval and Paquito D'Rivera and all these people. So I grew up watching them do their thing and I learned a lot.

CC: Wow! Nice. We share something in that too. I was thinking about that 'cause my father is a trumpet player and I grew up around him and his band and musicians.

CDP: That's great. It's amazing.

CC: It's nice. Marcus also grew up around musicians- around his granddad Roy Haynes and so forth.

CDP: And there's a funny story about my beginning. 'Cause my father didn't really want me to be a musician. He was afraid – not afraid – but he knows that the missing pieces could be rough at times and he wanted me to be a doctor or a lawyer or something, but my mom had different plans. So she took me to music school behind his back.

CC: Oh!

CDP: Because the Cuban schools are free but you have to have an attitude toward music. You have to have some good-

CC: Some talent.

CDP: So I went and I passed!

CC: At what age?

CDP: At about 8 years old. '

CC: Oh, I see. Right and early.

CDP: I used to play cello before. I play a little bit still.

CC: Oh I see. And then when did you move to the US?

CDP: I moved to the US in 1996.

CC: So you've been on the scene in the US for a while now.

CDP: Yea. Well, you know, my scene was kind of slow at the beginning like it is for everybody. You have to pay some dues, like they say here. So I really started getting better gigs around 1999, 98-99. I started working with- my first good gig was the United Nation Orchestra. Which was with Paquito. Paquito, at the time, was being bandleader. That used to be Dizzy Gillespie's band.

CC: That's right, I remember when that group was together. You were in that.

CDP: Yeah I played some few gigs and then from then on I started playing with different people. David Sanchez and then I played with Danilo Perez a couple of times and then with Gonzalo.

CC: Nice man, nice. I'm glad we hooked up. It's a pleasure. We've been having fun on the stage.

CDP: I'm loving it man, you know.

CC: Let's, for the listeners, let's focus in on the repertoire a little bit and talk about some of the tunes. I sent you a couple of demos and a PDF of music.

CDP: The listeners need to know the story. So, I get a call from your manager, Bill. Actually, no, the first call I got was from Stanley. Stanley Clarke. And he left a message on my phone.

CC: Yeah, 'cause we were talking and I said "Who should I call, Stanley?"

CDP: And Stanley said, "Hey Carlitos! Hey man, we haven't spoke in a couple of years. I've been talking about you to Chick Corea and you're going to get a call." I didn't think it would happen. And I thought it was really nice of Stanley. Who would imagine that Chick Corea would call me? I was sitting in the house and — I can't remember what I was doing and I get a call from your manager and I was like "Oh my god, this is really happening." And then you call me. Anyway, you sent me the music and I was practicing and practicing and practicing and two days before the rehearsals you sent me 8 new tunes!

[Both laugh.]

CDP: I sat in there and I closed my eyes and I'm like "Man, I'm really going to suck."

CC: I wanted you to have all the information.

CDP: That was rough. That was a rough bump. But I got through it.

CC: You came right up on it, man. You still got to read a little bit of the music. I think you got most of it memorized now.

CDP: A little bit, yes.

CC: Yeah, it's looking good. It took the rest of us, me even, a while to get off the written page. But its nice —

CDP: I am looking forward to that. Trying to be a little bit more free. I'm still afraid not to look at it. And get lost and mess something up. But I'm looking forward to not having to read so I can be a little bit more free.

CC: There's only a couple of spots, it's in "Galaxy" and in "Portals." Otherwise — a lot of the tunes are jam tunes. "Fingerprints" is new. There is a lot of new stuff that we put in since the record. 'Cause we do "Galaxy" and "Portals" and "Chia" and "Outside of Space" sometimes.

CDP: You put always nuances on every tune. Even on well known tunes like "It Could Happen to You." You still have your touch.

CC: Kind of an arrangement. That was nice with the rendition last night was really nice. "It Could Happen to You." Yeah, I like to keep all the flavors that I enjoy. You know, in the music. Let's see now, I don't know — you know. That seems pretty good. What do you think, Dan?

Dan: I'd be interested to hear what you thought of the tunes when you got them. Got the lead sheets and then heard the record.

CDP: I was scared to death, man. I was so scared when I got them, you know. Cause, Chick Corea's music is no easy task for anybody, you know? So when I got it I was like "Wow! Am I going to be able to do this?" I was really nervous. And when I actually got to the rehearsals in New York, Chick made me feel so comfortable that I said "Okay, I think I'll be okay." You know.

CC: Yeah you came up strong on the first rehearsal. Everyone was happy. But I'm curious, just from what you said, I mean technically, what I written for the bass, is not that difficult.

CDP: Technique is never the issue. It's the language. Technique is not — you know, everyone can play fast.

CC: Or those notes. I was trying to think what, in the charts, what would be technically challenging. "Humpty Dumpty" is the hardest line we got in the whole repertoire.

CDP: Right, but it's the language that I'm referring to. Cause it's a language that we're speaking and I want to be able to be fluent. And that's what I was nervous about.

CC: Well, you know, that's something I'm really looking for in the band. When I found the title, or the name for the band and we call this – we got to call this band something, and Vigil. 'Cause I've been thinking about this for years. But the idea is inclusive of musical cultures that come together. 'Cause I grew up, first in a jazz culture but then very quickly, when I was in highschool, I touched the Latin culture. I worked with a Portuguese guy that had a dance band.

CDP: Fados?

CC: I don't know what they were called. I think it was just a simple, commercial, Latin dance music. But there was a conga player in the band named Bill Fitch who later worked with Cal Tjader. Actually he was was a tight friend with Donald. They were good friends. Anyway, Bill was the guy who introduced me in to Latin music. He was an Afro-American guy but he was deep into conga. So he showed me the music of Latin New York. Eddie Palmieri and Tito Puente. So that was my interest so then my jazz language started to expand, 'cause I really like that a lot 'cause the jazz music, like the jazz musicians, they get serious and a little bit introverted and the latin rhythms are for dance! So, latin music tends to be more extroverted, you know?

CDP: But, I think, in your music, its not only in those two worlds that are being conveyed. I hear this like way more. For example, the music that we're playing now has a lot of African influence. I mean, afrobeat music and sometimes you can even hear a little bit of rock n' roll. It has a lot of influence.

CC: Yeah, that's for sure. The way I think about it, the long cultures of music, like any kind of pop music, always has a basis in either afro music afro cuban music, afro Puerto Rican music, afro New York music, or European classical music has it's influence. And then sometimes more Indian or Oriental influences come in or Middle Eastern which goes into Spanish and flamenco influences, you know and all that. But those are the basic streams that I love. But between the Spanish flamenco music and the South American and afro Cuban rhythms and the jazz rhythms, somehow in there, that's what Vigil is about and we have a good combination now. Because Marcus and what me and Marcus bring to the table and what you and Luisito bring. And then, Tim and Charles - their knowledge of harmony and classical music. You gotta hear Tim's orchestral music.

CDP: I keep hearing about it. We have a really good friend in common, Billy Childs. Billy is always like "You gotta hear it. His writing is amazing."

CC: Billy introduced me to Tim. That's how I met Tim in the beginning. So in the band now we have a nice combination of experience.

CDP: So that's what I refer to about, a little bit before about. That's what I meant about the complexity of your music more than the technical aspect is all these things that I just talked about. All these influences and being able to switch [snaps] from one thing to another and be seamless, thats the complexity of it. Not being a purist. Not like [hums bass line] no means that but having that flavor and make it sound organic.

CC: A good example is when we play "Hot House," or we play "Tempus Fugit," because these are bebop songs. They come from the 40's and bebop rhythm, but we play them in a latin rhythm. So occasionally I'll go into a little bit of piano style montuno, sort of. Just a little bit, it only takes a little bit. And so the kind of – but there's – I don't know – thats one place we're outside the box of everything. It's not jazz. It's not Latin.

CDP: If you want to get technical about it when we're playing those tunes exactly, Marcus is not completely on the Latin side, and that's the beauty of it. 'Cause you can hear his right symbol and it's got that beboppy kind of vibe on it. And Luisito is completely there and I'm kind of there and then you – painting on top of it.

CC: Yeah, it's nice. It's been a lot of fun. That's why I like the direction we're going. I'm looking forward to the next record.

CDP: Me too.

CC: I think that's good, huh? That's good, I don't wanna keep you any longer.

Dan: Is there anything that you want to add?

CDP: Well the only thing I want to add is that I hope when I'm your age I have the same urge and the same hunger that you have, the thirst that you have to learn about things. I was very impressed when I met you that you asked me things "What is this and what is that rhythm?" You asked me a couple of questions and I was like, "Wow this is really incredible." That's why you always have this long career and the music always stays current and this band represents that. How current you are right now and how different it is from what you've done before.

CDP: I just keep interested. That's what I tell everyone who asks me, "What's your secret?" I have no secret of course. The Japanese, cause we're here in Tokyo, the Japanese have an interesting way of investigating jazz. I did an interview yesterday, and this guy from the newspaper, was asking me – he was deep in and he knows all the music and he knows every detail and he asks, "How do you keep so fresh and blah blah blah," and I was trying to figure out a way to describe it to him and I had an idea, a very simple one, that I'm going to use actually for the webinar and try and explore a little bit more which is, there's a difference between having a student attitude or a teacher attitude, because the student is the one that is interested. The teacher tries to be sometimes interesting. He tries to interest the student by being interesting. And he says, "What about this, and then this culture and then look at this thing over here," and he's trying to be interesting and the most life-giving way to be, is to be interested. To be interesting is just, everything comes in at you and there is no benefit to that, you see? But to be interested and you are now involved in life and that is the attitude of a student. If I'm always in a learning mode, learning something out of what I'm doing, I feel like how I felt when I was 16 years old.

CDP: This is an interesting story, when I met you at the rehearsals, we were playing and we were going through the music and I was very concentrated in what I was doing and we played a tune and I changed the bass line a little bit and you stop "Eh! What is that?" and I was like "Uh-oh. I'm already fired right?" (both laugh) "What is that?" And I said "Uhh, I just changed that a little bit, Chick." And you were like "Yeah yeah, but what is it, what is it?" and you were so interested about it. It's where we do (hums bass line).

CC: Oh yeah, that afrobeat thing.

CDP: Right! And when I played it, you were like "What is that?" And I was like "Uh-oh I'm fired already."

[Both laugh.]

CC: That was the thing that I had written for Henry Cole's record that I told you about. Well we're finding new bass lines and new stuff. It's fun. We're going to have our first tune, well "Not Ornette's Theme," we're working on.

CDP: That's the perfect title. Especially after I heard the original, I was like, "Oh man!"

[Both laugh.]

CC: Ok, this is Carlitos Del Puerto. Do I say it right, now?

CDP: You said it correctly.

CC: Del Puerto.”

CDP: “Del Puerto.” Yes.

CC: “Del Puerto.” Thanks man.

CDP: Thank you! Thanks for having me. It’s an honor.

CC: Yeah. That’s Dan Muse, our muse, in the background.

CDP: Yeah Dan!

Dan: Hey everybody!

CC: Alright.

Russ Davis: I certainly hope you enjoyed this Episode 3 of Music Magic with Chick Corea, the podcast which has included the conversation between Chick and an excited young man who you know was just on fire about being part of the Vigil, young bassist from Cuba Carlitos Del Puerto. This is Russ Davis from Voice of America and MoJa radio and we hope you’ll join us for the next episode of Music Magic with Chick Corea. Before I tell you about that, let me invite you to leave a five star review on iTunes where you accessed this podcast and you’ll let the rest of the world know how much you enjoyed Music Magic with Chick Corea.

Now, if you’re a musician and you’d like to have an up close and personal relationship with Chick Corea in a very special webinar, you should get on the mailing list to be part of the upcoming Chick Corea Workshop, coming in March 2014. The way to do that is go to this website, ChickCoreaWorkshops.com. You’ll not only have a chance to get on the waiting list for this must-attend online Chick Corea Music Workshop, but you can also view a great free video of a Chick Corea Music workshop that features music with John Patitucci and Antonio Sanchez, and get some thoughts from other students about what they think about Chick’s workshops.

Now, on the next episode of Music Magic with Chick Corea, Chick sits down in Tokyo to speak with the young percussionist who is so in-demand these days, he brought his great energy and creativity to the live project, he is Luisito Quintero! You’ll hear Chick and Luisito talk about all the work they did together to bring this great music to life on stage. That’s next time on Music Magic with Chick Corea! Join us then, won’t you?

About Music Magic

In conversations with his musical collaborators and friends, Chick reveals insights into his music universe. From the tour buses and airports to the recording studios and backstage. You’ll get a behind-the-scenes look at the details of the creative process from the legends of jazz. For more information check out www.ChickCorea.com. “These podcasts introduce a topic that’s very exciting to me: giving a helping hand to other musicians.” —Chick