



**HOPKINS CENTER**

presents

# Yerba Buena

Andres Levin *guitar, electronics, MD*

Xiomara Laugart *vocals*

Pedrito Martinez *percussion, vocals*

CuCu Diamantes *vocals*

El Chino *rhymes, vocals*

Ron Blake *saxophone, flute, vocals*

Rashawn Ross *trumpet, rhymes, vocals*

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Part of Encuentro Latino: A Dartmouth Summer Arts Festival

This performance is made possible in part by generous support from the Evelyn A. Jaffe Hall Fund #1.

**Saturday, July 30, 2005 • 3 pm**

BEMA • Dartmouth College

# ABOUT THE ARTISTS

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It is said that in ancient times there was a *curandera* who collected all the earth's herbs with the most healing properties and, with her magic, turned them into one good herb that she later planted to grow as wild weeds.

If there was an alchemist who could do that with music today, it would be songwriter, producer and multi-instrumentalist bandleader Andres Levin. And his magic weed is **Yerba Buena**: a blend of African-rooted Latin music (Cuban *rumba*, Colombian *cumbia*, Pan-Caribbean *solca* and Nuyorican boogaloo) with New York hip-hop, Motown soul, Nigerian Afrobeat and a dash of Middle Eastern themes played by an international crew of star musicians.

Putting his magic touch on a variety of music since he arrived from his native Venezuela in 1989 to become a "resident alien," Levin has written and/or produced for artists ranging from Chaka Khan and Tina Turner to David Byrne and Arto Lindsay. His most recent credits include D'Angelo, Macy Gray, Dead Prez, Me'Shell Ndegeocello and his role as principal producer of the recent *Red Hot + Riot* Fela Kuti tribute.

For the past few years, Levin has been in high demand throughout the fast-growing world of Latin alternative music, producing albums for Aterciopelados, Los Amigos Invisibles, El Gran Silencio, Ely Guerra, Carlinhos Brown, Moreno +2, as well as producing key tracks with Caetano Veloso and Marisa Monte.

For the Yerba Buena project, Levin was introduced to key players by Cuban songwriter Ileana Padrón. Seizing a moment where the purveyors of the sounds from Lagos, Havana and New York City were within arms' reach, he brought them to his funhouse, The Fun Machine Studios in Manhattan, to create a distinct and innovative urban Latino sound only hinted at before by like-minded groups such as El Gran Silencio, Ozomatli and Manu Chao's Radio Bemba.

Like some of the great big bands of Cuba (think

Benny Moré or Machito), Levin set up Yerba Buena as an on-going workshop open to collaborations in the studio and on stage with guest stars. The result is a dazzling and ravaging live show and studio recordings that have a character all their own.

Havana's diva-in-waiting Xiomara Laugart (Did someone say a new Celia Cruz?), percussions maestro/Yoruban chanter Pedrito Martinez and heart-throb singer El Chino take turns leading their audiences into frenzied dancing. Singer CuCu Diamantes along with the brilliant St. Thomas-born jazz saxophonist Ron Blake and young trumpeter Rashawn Ross complete the core group, infusing their stylistic blasts to the volatile mix of true Nueva York.

"I like to take the live vibe back to the studio and continue adding to the foundations we've already laid down," says Dré, as his American friends call him. Levin co-wrote all the songs, applying his signature layered-style of production. "All my friends know I'm a technology beat geek," he says. "Producing on a computer, I put together alien rhythm sections of players that reside on different continents, or I get artists who wouldn't normally record together in one place. That's the Fun Machine way."

For Yerba's Grammy-nominated debut album, *President Alien*, Levin invited friends he's been collaborating with for years from various musical scenes: singer/bassist Me'Shell Ndegeocello, Brazilian singer/songwriter/percussionist Carlinhos Brown, downtown guitarist Marc Ribot, keyboardist Money Mark, jazz trumpeter Roy Hargrove, Dead Prez rapper Sticman, bassist Sebastian Steinberg and drummers Horacio "El Negro" Hernández and Terreon "Tank" Gully, among many others.

"A lot of the songs are pieced together like a puzzle with different artists that came through. It's not like a traditional song; they were written as blocks of melodies and grooves. Each section is interchangeable," says Dré, who also debuted his label Fun Machine

# ABOUT THE ARTISTS CONTINUED

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Records with the album. “But one thing’s for sure: I try to create an environment where everyone’s personality comes out. Everyone’s put into a stylistic vortex, going into one end and comes out the other with the Yerba sound.”

With so many possibilities, both music fans and critics quickly embraced the group after taking just one sonic dose at one of their contagious live shows, which included multiple summer festival dates such as Central Park Summerstage, The Hollywood Bowl and The Newport Jazz Festival. Even The Dave Matthews Band got hooked immediately, inviting them to open at several arena dates. Further evidence of Yerba Buena’s intoxicating effect occurred when the prestigious William Morris Agency made an unprecedented decision to sign the band before they had even recorded an album with an official label.

After attending one of their earliest showcases in New York, Ben Ratliff of *The New York Times* hailed Yerba Buena as “one of New York’s best new dance bands, mixing up the Latin boogaloo of the ’60s, Cuban religious music, some American soul and Fela-like Afrobeat. It’s a history of the transmission of Yoruban culture in a nutshell, and it’s a good party.”

*President Alien* plays with the lyrical quality of the official status of permanent residents in the United States that’s scrolled across every legal immigrant’s Green Card: “Resident Alien.” It also captures Levin’s vision perfectly, having fun with the notion of a global tribe gathering in the music capital of the world. “It’s really just all about one nation under a drum,” he says.

Just released this month, Yerba Buena’s new concept album *Island Life* is an ambitious urban-tropical synthesis that won’t let you stop dancing. “I always want the Yerba Buena sound to be evolving,” says Levin. “Yerba Buena will always be about Afro-Cuban roots, but this record has more gypsy and

*cumbia* influences—sounds I’ve heard around the world and that I’m now hearing across New York as well. I think the confluence of different immigrant music in New York is a great avenue for pop culture to explore.”

Since Yerba Buena has always channeled the spirit of tropical island rhythms with the energy of New York, it’s fitting that the new album is titled *Island Life*. “I always thought it was funny when I would hear people in New York say that they need to ‘get away to an island’—forgetting that they were already living on one,” explains Levin. “With Manhattan’s growing Spanglish soul, the island music is right here on our own streets—whether it’s *merengue*, reggaeton or even steel drums. *Island Life* is a state of mind, and a way to express my love affair with New York City.”

Like *President Alien*, *Island Life* features a staggeringly diverse lineup of guests, including John Leguizamo, Diego “El Cigala,” Les Nubians, Fulanito, Orishas, Joe Bataan, M1 of Dead Prez, Peret & Ile Aye, Gogol Bordello, Rossy de Palma and more. This impressive array of guests perfectly compliments the core members of Yerba Buena. The lineup that made *President Alien* swing so hard will leave dancers in need of oxygen this time out.

Even though Yerba Buena is going in so many exciting and progressive directions on *Island Life*, its basic mission remains the same. This is a band that holds on to whatever brings you closer to the heart, what lets your passion fly, whether you’re crazy in love, or just plain possessed on the dance floor. They are Latin-fusion ambassadors whose hip-shaking desires want to play Afrobeat one moment, *cumbia* another, with hip-hop to follow, throwing down a Yoruban chant or two. Finding that music throughout their island of Manhattan, Yerba Buena gets into your blood and won’t let you go.

This is Yerba Buena’s first performance at the Hopkins Center.

# COMING EVENTS

For tickets or information call the Box Office at 603.646.2422 or visit [hop.dartmouth.edu](http://hop.dartmouth.edu)

Dartmouth Department of Theater

## The Heidi Chronicles

by Wendy Wasserstein

Directed by Jamie Horton

This award-winning play follows Heidi through the sweeping social changes of the '60s, '70s and '80s.

Wednesday-Friday, August 3-5 & 10-12 • 8 pm

Sunday, August 7 • 5 pm • Sunday, August 14 • 2 pm

The Moore Theater • \$12 • Dartmouth students \$3 • All other students \$6

★ Post-performance discussion with the cast immediately following the performance on Friday, August 5

## New York Theatre Workshop

### Works-in-Progress

Warner Bentley Theater

\$10 • Dartmouth students \$3 • All other students \$6

#### Saturday, August 6

*There Are No Strangers Here* • 5 pm

*Modern House* • 8 pm

#### Saturday August 13

*El Conquistador!* • 5 pm

*Teach* • 8 pm

#### Saturday, August 20

*The Man Who Outgrew His Prison Cell* • 5 pm

*All That I Will Ever Be* • 8 pm

Meet-the-Artists Brown Bag Lunch Presentations

Tuesday, August 2, 9 & 16 • 12 noon

Faculty Lounge • Free

For more information, call the Dartmouth Theater Department at (603) 646-3691.

Jazz Vocalist

## Jane Monheit

A jazz icon ranked with Diana Krall and Dianne Reeves intoxicates with vintage jazz standards.

Friday, August 19 • 8 pm • Spaulding Auditorium

\$28 • Dartmouth students \$5

★ Post-performance discussion with Jane Monheit immediately following the performance

### HOPKINS CENTER MANAGEMENT STAFF

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