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« This is a crossing. Not buckled down in the hold of the ship, but up careening on its decks. And yet, it all starts with calm. As if to tame the winds on the open sea. The notes of the expanse. So far, so close. It's the magic of the Cuban *Santería*, the Brazilian *Candomblé*, and the Haitian and Beninese *Vodûn*. It's about intertwining what is from here and what is from there. These Caribbean stories are also stories born of History in great upheaval. It appears that Samy Thiébault has grasped the plasticity of this music. It comes in various forms. Rarely is there yelling; this music tends to its geographic roots and looks after its cultural branches, yet it also bears witness to the violence and disturbances that led to its existence – the chasm from which it came, the threshold of the chasm it often found itself standing over in self-defense. It bears witness to the chaos that gave it substance, and a growling serenity. »

*Christiane Taubira*

Sometimes, one must let oneself be guided by truths other than hard fact, even when these facts have been with us for a long time, and even when we are certain that everything lines up perfectly that way, side by side. Jazz is jazz; calypso is calypso is calypso, and merengue is something else – though we are not quite sure what. Give or take, it's a kind of zouk that came before salsa.

And so that's where we stood. The cool guys played jazz; the hotel group played calypso, and the caterwauling over at the bar, well, that had to be merengue. Sure, there were some nuances, because we all know that Sonny Rollins played "St. Thomas" and that Harry Belafonte's talents weren't limited to making blue-haired ladies sigh in nostalgic contentedness. We were sure that jazz was jazz and that music for tourists is pretty enough, but that all you need to know are three chords and two patterns and you've got it down.

And then Samy Thiébault came along. He didn't go off to the Caribbean thinking he would wage war on cliché or lead a crusade against geo- musicological platitude. No – he simply developed a passion for music that went against the grain of a heap of well-established ideas. "It hit me like a ton of bricks," he said.

*Caribbean Stories* is all about this ton of bricks: an incredible mixing of music that reveals how each tradition is linked, intertwined, related. Jazz, calypso, merengue, waltz, bolero, cha-cha-cha, and a hundred other genres in a massive tornado at once profound, hedonistic, moving, poetic, and political.

This loquacious, classy saxophonist isn't content with just going beyond jazz. He shows – or rather, he admits – that jazz is one mode among many in a huge, tragic, sublime adventure of white, blacks, and humans of hundreds of other colors from three continents, who for centuries have been set on transforming a painful fate into shared splendor. Samy Thiébault plunges into the music of the Creole archipelago without establishing a hierarchy, as if he were the poor soul set upon the paths of History from port to port, from ball to ball, from misfortune to misfortune, from resilience to resilience.

In brief: *Caribbean Stories* recounts the survival of African slaves, of down-and-out Europeans, tormented American Indians, and mixed-race travelers. There is sharing, instant transformation, and instinctive hybridizing. Playing with Samy Thiébault, there is a group from all over what Édouard Glissant called this "Tout-Monde," or "whole world": the percussionist Inor Sotolongo, the drummer Arnaud Dolmen, the bassist Felipe Cabrera, the guitarists Hugo Lippi and Ralph Lavital – two Cubans, one Guadeloupean, one Frenchman, and an Englishman.

Born on the Ivory Coast to a French father and a Moroccan mother, Samy is more than familiar with the mixed ideas of the Caribbean: to the extent that musical reality hit him in Venezuela, echoed back in Puerto Rico, brought him to Trinidad, and then, in French Antilles, showed up in the form of beguine and all the tambourine beginnings of Bob Marley...

In *Caribbean Stories*, Samy revisits the world before jazz criticism and the oversimplification of cultural maps. He returns to nomadism, to music when it was laid out on the table at a waterfront hole-in-the-wall café, aglow like someone who's just invented a crossroads. His "Pajarillo Verde", based on a poetic Venezuelan rebel song, turns into a virtuosic Coltranian cheek-to-cheek number; while "Let the Freedom Reign" summons the spirits of Count Ossie and Charlie Mingus, and "Calypsotopia" packs in bits

of itinerant standards in a sun-drenched dance; and “Puerto Rican Folk Song” transfers the jibara of island mountains to a New York loft in the 1970s. “Poesia Sin Fin” is suspended somewhere between the blues, cha-cha-cha, modal jazz, and the metaphysical syncretism of Jodorowsky. “Aida” gives a glimmer of Cuba in a romantic, exhilarating meditation, and “Tanger la Negra” is a Creole reflection on the Strait of Gibraltar...

Sometimes it seems like Strayhorn is walking barefoot in Havana, that street kids from Port of Spain have taken over the stage at the New Morning in Paris, that the Conservatory has moved to a dance club... Or maybe it's that Samy Thiébault, saxophonist and flutist, who's been garnering respect now for quite a while, has decided to embrace the wide spectrum of Creole music without saying which is the best, or the most accurate, or the cleverest. He simply makes us hear its humanity. This trip to the Caribbean gives this music its humble nobility of ultimate consolation. And its truth.

Bertrand Dicale

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