

Señor Gato

blends Latin, jazz and funk

By Kate Lavin

—Arts & Entertainment Editor

Denver-based Latin jazz band Señor Gato is turning in its drum set today as it prepares for an all-hand percussion show at Zino Ristorante in Edwards tonight. Señor Gato front man Dan Egger-Belandria explains that the sound is a little more exotic than traditional jazz sets.

Members of the band Señor Gato first got together about a year and a half ago after Egger-Belandria returned from Cuba. The drummer-percussionist traveled to the Caribbean to study Latin percussion, and soon after the drummer's return to U.S. soil, he met a native Cuban pianist.

The duo started Señor Gato, and while the pianist is no longer with the band, Señor Gato's Cuban-Caribbean rhythms prevail.

Egger-Belandria describes the sound of Señor Gato as Latin Jazz. By combining Latin rhythms and jazz standards, the band plays classics that older jazz fans can appreciate while reaching the younger dance crowd as well.

"Latin jazz should encompass elements of jazz, but the rhythm should be Latin. The melodies and harmonies should be what makes it all jazz," Egger-Belandria said. "We don't swing quite as much because we are pushing these Latin rhythms."

The percussionist says that a long-time interest in Latin music and dance culture is in his blood. His mother is from Venezuela. But Afro-Cuban and Caribbean drumming is an interest that the young percussionist stumbled upon all by himself.

By studying in Brazil, Madrid and New York City with masters like Changuito (Los Van Van), Anga and Enrique Pla (Irakere), Amadito Valdez and Carlos Gonzales (Buena Vista Social Club), he has developed his talents on the congas, timbales and drums in the genres of reggae and Latin jazz.

Dan Egger-Belandria stresses that during any given performance, every musician in Señor Gato gets a chance to make a personal connection with the audience.

One of the most notable personalities in Señor Gato is pianist Marc Sabatella, who placed among the top 20 performers in the Thelonious Monk International Jazz Piano Competition, and swept the 1996 Cognac Hennessy Best of Colorado Jazz Search.

Sabatella is perhaps the most well versed of the Señor Gato musicians in the area of straight-ahead jazz.

"Marc, the pianist, is such a tremendous player. He brings more of the jazz element to the band," Egger-Belandria said. "He brings a depth of knowledge that rounds out the group."

Clarinet and sax player Dexter Payne is as close as it comes to a Jack-of-all-trades for Señor Gato. In addition to single handedly carrying the woodwind section of the band, Payne also steps in on percussion.

"For a soloist not being a percussionist, he has an excellent grasp on percussion, like the claves and maracas," Egger-Belandria said.

Bassist Jon Cullison found an interest in Latin jazz styles by playing bass around various Latin neighborhoods in Florida.

"I think one of the overall impressions that most people get from the band is that it's a well-oiled machine," Egger-Belandria said. "Each player has some stand-out talent, and each member steps out and wows people at one time or another during the show. There is real intense playing from every individual."

Señor Gato (or Mr. Cat as it is translated in Spanish) is playing from 9 p.m. to close at Zino Ristorante's last jazz night of the season. Cover for the show is \$5.

Kate Lavin covers arts and entertainment for the Vail Daily.

Meow!

Señor Gato
9 p.m. TODAY
Zino Ristorante, Edwards

Special to the Daily Latin jazz band Señor Gato knows just how to blend two very different musical genres. You can hear for yourself tonight at Zino Ristorante in Edwards.

