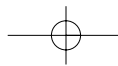


PHOTO BY TONY RATH

ANDY PALACIO

THE BRIDE OF THE GARIFUNA

BY CC SMITH



This was supposed to have been a very different story—in fact it had been written, complete with a happy ending and visions of a bright future, and was ready to go to press. Then the inconceivable happened: Word came on Jan. 18 that Andy Palacio was seriously ill, had been airlifted from Belize to the U.S. for treatment, was not expected to survive, and finally, all too finally, arrived the bulletin on Jan. 19 that he had passed away at the age of 47. As the news spread instantaneously through the Internet, an international outpouring of appreciations, tributes and condolences followed, including one from Bishop Desmond Tutu. A state funeral and memorial concert were held in Belize on Jan. 25, and he was laid to rest in his birthplace of Barranco.



PHOTO BY CC SMITH

Andy Palacio stands in front of his childhood home in Barranco.

Sadly, unexpectedly, this story is now about "The Last Time I Saw Andy." The present and future tenses will all now be past. I am still waiting to wake up from this horrible dream to find that this sweet, humble, talented, intelligent man was not taken from us, suddenly, unfairly, at the zenith of his career. But it is reality, all too real for all of us still reeling, brokenhearted, in shock. The ancestors have called him home.

I had known Andy since 1988, as he would often drop by my radio program with his latest cassette tape of a new party music called punta rock. Los Angeles was home base for him back then when he was not in Belize. Bright and well-spoken, he explained the connection between his Garifuna people and Africa, and was instrumental in familiarizing me with his unique Central American culture whose music was Caribbean, African and indigenous Carib Indian all at once.

I hugely enjoyed my associations with the sizable, thriving Belizean community in Los Angeles as I discovered the diaspora under my nose and shared it with my radio audience, introducing its wealth of music through frequent interviews with musicians Bredda David, Sidney Mejia and his Chatuye band, and Caye Records producer and concert promoter Patrick Barrow. I traveled to Belize in 1994, still intrigued by the rich cultural mix offered by the small country.

I happily took notice of a new record label, Stonetree, that was pointing the musical direction back to the roots, as in 1995 Andy's *Keimoun* album blossomed from his punta

Continued on page 32



Legends Of Reggae

★ **1973**
THE HARDER THEY COME

Mango to America: England's Island Records establishes the reggae-specialist imprint Mango Records in America, debuting with the soundtrack to the Jimmy Cliff film *The Harder They Come*. Features Jimmy's title track and "Many Rivers To Cross," plus cuts from Toots & The Maytals, Desmond Dekker, Scotty, The Slickers & The Melodians.

ALSO AVAILABLE
THE HARDER THEY COME DELUXE EDITION

2CD set featuring the original soundtrack plus crucial reggae of the era 1968-1972.

★ **1973**
Bob Marley & The Wailers CATCH A FIRE

Rebel music. The legend of *The Harder They Come*'s Ivan in the flesh and the blaze is set. "Stir It Up," "Concrete Jungle," "Stop That Train," "Kinky Reggae," "Slave Driver," "400 Years."





★ **For Clues And Answers Go To**
www.myspace.com/islandreggae ★

AVAILABLE AT **amazon.com**

bobmarley.com
islandrecords.com
ilovethatsong.com

TUFF GONG

Chronicles HIPPO RECORDS

UMe
A UNIVERSAL MUSIC COMPANY

© 2008 Universal Music Enterprises, a Division of UMG Recordings, Inc.

ANDY PALACIO

THE PRIDE OF THE GARIFUNA

Continued from page 31



rock style into paranda and traditional Garifuna chants. And in 2007, I was immensely proud of Andy's achievement in drawing global attention to his people and his homeland with the great success of *Watina*. It was gratifying to learn that he had gone beyond the party music of punta rock and deep inside his roots, and had embarked on a crusade to protect and preserve the Garifuna culture from extinction. He truly gave his life for his people and his country.

I imagine the Garifuna ancestors, seeing the tremendous work he had done, decided that it was time for him to rest, time for other hands to continue the work. My prayer is that the work he began will be multiplied a thousandfold and his legacy will be remembered forever.



In November 2007, I joined an international corps of journalists on a visit to Belize, sponsored by Cumbancha Records, Stonetree Records and the Belize Tourism Board, to experience the music and culture of the Garifuna people, and was privileged to be offered glimpses of Belizean life rarely experienced by a casual tourist. We had the opportunity to see Andy Palacio and the Garifuna Collective play concerts in Dangriga and Hopkins, to accompany him and various band members as we traveled through the country, and to spend time with several of the singers who are featured on Stonetree/Cumbancha's forthcoming *Umalali: The Garifuna Women's Project*.

It's only a two-hour flight from Houston, but often it seemed worlds away. For one as steeped in African and Caribbean experiences as I, similarities were constantly apparent: the picturesquely crumbling colonial architecture of Belize City and the lively hustle and bustle of the streets, the thatched and tin roofs and dirt roads in the rural areas, the obvious African ancestry of many of the faces. And especially, the music—in addition to the reggae pumped out of loudspeakers in the city, the African connections came through loud and clear: hand drums, which appear in both social and spiritual contexts, played with a wide variety of complex rhythms, the call-and-response patterns and intonations of the voices.

Belize is not a Caribbean island, but it has pretty much all the qualifications to join the League of Island Paradises except water surrounding all sides. Geographically isolated, nestled between Spanish-speaking Mexico and Guatemala, and bordered on the east by the Caribbean sea, the former colony of British Honduras became independent in 1981. An island on the land, the only English-speaking country in Central America has a diverse population united by the Creole patois common to the English-speaking Caribbean islands, as well as a colonial history, tropical ambience, clear waters, warm beaches and distinct African cultural retentions.

Peaceful Belize rarely makes the news unless a hurricane blows through the unprotected, low-lying terrain, and even then it may be noticed only by the Weather Channel. The nation has some 300,000



PHOTOS BY CC SMITH



• Left: Andy catches up on the news on the flight to Punta Gorda.

• Above: Procession of drummers and singers waving branches greets Andy as he returns to Barranco.

• Singer Desere Arana and Garifuna Collective musician Rolando "Chichiman" Sosa.

people, a multicultural polyglot population of Creoles, mestizos, Mayans, East Indians, Chinese, Amish, immigrants from other Central American countries, an assortment of American retirees and Peace Corps volunteers, and the Garinagu, also known as the Garifuna, who comprise seven percent of the census.

The Garinagu have a distinctive language called Garifuna, and a culture that is a product of their African and Carib Indian background. (While "Garifuna" actually refers to the individual and the language, and Garinagu is the plural or collective term for the people, Garifuna is often used to identify both.) Their story began in 1635 when shiploads of Africans believed to have been taken from the region that is now Nigeria, Congo and Angola bound for slavery in the New World were wrecked off the Caribbean island of St. Vincent. The survivors found the island inhabited by Carib Indians and a union of Afro-Indian culture and language resulted. Present-day Garifuna society reflects the fusion of the food, music and customs from that time. In 1787 the people were forced off the island by British armed forces, first to Roatan Island, Honduras and then to the Central American mainland, settling on the coastal regions of what is now Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. The Belizean Garifunas annually mark their arrival on the Central American shores from Roatan on Nov. 19, 1832, with Settlement Day, which features a reenactment of the boats landing in Dangriga, and is celebrated as a day of cultural and historical pride.

Andy Palacio, familiarly known throughout Belize as "Andy P," was a fixture in Belizean music since the late '80s, making his mark with a propulsive music called punta rock, based on a traditional Garifuna rhythm, which rivals soca for inspiring waist-winding dance-floor mania and put Belize on the world music map. In 1991, along with a feature on Jamaican dancehall hitmaker Shabba Ranks, *The Beat* published a story on the popularity of Andy and the Belizean music scene. Fifteen years later, Shabba is a has-been, but

Andy was making the best music of his life.

Born in the tiny southern Belizean fishing village of Barranco in 1960 and raised in the Garifuna traditions, his life path took him first to Punta Gorda for his high school education, then onward to England and Los Angeles. His early involvement with the literacy program of the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua marked him as a freedom fighter as well as an educator. Taking up the torch ignited by Pen Cayetano, who established the Original Turtle Shell Band in 1979-80 (just a year before Belizean independence, in response to seeing Garifuna youth losing contact with their culture), Andy began singing of Garifuna heritage in punta rock songs like "Roots," "Ereba" (about the cassava bread that is a daily staple), and "Gi Mi Punta Rock"—proudly proclaiming it as "Belizean music" to all the world and giving the younger generation a hip new music with which to identify.

By the mid-'90s, he had become even more of a public figure than in his punta rock-star days and a role model as well. As deputy minister of the National Institute for Cultural History, where he oversaw efforts to preserve and protect the legacies of all the various ethnic groups in the country, he continued the struggle for Garifuna acceptance and identity. His contributions did not go unnoticed: He was awarded the UNESCO title of Artist for Peace in 2007 and honored by the Belizean government with the title of Cultural Ambassador.

His convictions and commitment inspired his work in producing and recording *Watina* with the Garifuna Collective to further champion the culture of his people, creating some very fine music in the process. This effort paid off beyond all expectations, as Top 10 charts around the world, including those in this issue of *The Beat*, selection as WOMEX's artist of the year 2007, and an extensive tour of Europe and North America brought global attention to the record, as well as to Andy as a world music hero—an overnight success 20 years in the making. For Andy P, the international acclaim and validation by the global community provided an