

Daily Dispatch, Friday, March 2,

Classified advertising ☎ 743-4343

2001

Grammy-winning jazz



BackBeat

with Cornelius Thomas

HE PLUNGES straight into the groove with *Anabis*, taking you to the heights of jazz improvisation and blending Portuguese-African influences on Cuban rhythms at the same time. This is acoustic pianist Chucho Valdes on his Grammy-winning Latin jazz album, *Live at the Village Vanguard*.

In the hurly burly of Eminem's misogyny and Elton John's gesture, it has been forgotten that jazz also featured at the prestigious Grammy Awards.

This year Diane Reeves took the honours for Jazz Vocal Album with *Live in Concert*; Bela Fleck and the Flecktones walked off with Contemporary Jazz Album for *Outbound*; Pat Metheny won the Instrumental Solo with *(Go) Get It*; Joe Lovano took Large Jazz Ensemble for *52 Street Themes*; and Branford Marsalis carried off the prize for Jazz Instrumental Album with *Contemporary Jazz-Branford Marsalis*.

But it was the Valdes Quartet's offering that captured what jazz was and is about — African traditional polyrhythms and call and response, transformed by slaves (most of whom went to Brazil and Cuba, and not to the United States), combining with American Deep South blues, migratory experience and instrumental improvisation at the Village Vanguard in New York City.

This club, its fame lately enhanced by Wynton Marsalis, has



CHUCHO VALDES

for the past 60 odd years schooled every jazz musician of note and produced umpteen "live" albums.

But there was no reason to expect anything super special to come out of it when the relatively unknown Valdes walked in for a gig one night in April, 1999.

After opening with *Anabis*, however, word spread and proprietor

Lorraine Gordon kept them for several sets — all of which sold out. Crowds gathered on Seventh Street to catch suggestions of the magic that flowed from Roberto Guillot's conga and bata drums, Francisco Pampin's acoustic bass, and Raul Roque's trap drums.

Anabis is followed by a "son" tune.

"Son," Valdes says on the album liner notes, "is an antecedent of today's salsa music, and like ragtime the son blends African and European." *Son XXI* uses those blends and takes jazz to a dimension fit for the 21st century.

Six equally excellent tunes follow, with the traditional *My Funny Valentine* holding the centre.

Throughout, percussion gone postmodern fills out the sound, giving the album a zippy edge.

Live at the Village Vanguard concludes with Lorraine's *Habanera* in which Valdes improvises by collaging eclectic structures from the three continents' music he loves.

Forget Steely Dan and Eminem a while; buy this Valdes, and allow yourself to be blown by the best sounds from the cross-streams of Cuba and Africa meeting at America's jazz mecca.

● One of the premier jazz bassists in South Africa, Donne Dowlman, who is well known in Gauteng for her lyrical improvisations, and conceptual drummer Mark Rausch will join Alan Webster and Matthew Boon at Smokey Swallows this Sunday.